

## THE SMALL HOURS

by Francis Durbridge

Francis Durbridge's "The Small Hours", presented by the Beaufort Players in the Ascension Hall on 23rd, 24th and 25th November, was as full of mysterious characters, dramatic twists, red herrings and sudden deaths as you would expect from the creator of radio's most famous detective, Paul Temple.

It opened with two men chatting on a plane, a scene which I found rather unconvincing. They seemed simply like two actors pretending to be passengers. However a sudden announcement from the pilot that the plane had been hijacked quickly brought the play to life.

Soon we were deep in a complex tale that involved affairs, blackmail, murder threats, the most beautiful emerald necklace in the world, duplicate airline bags, a faked audio tape, a koala bear and of course a rich mixture of intriguing people - some seen and some just talked about.

The plot fairly raced along, with plenty of typical Durbridge lines like "You lied to the inspector and you lied to me", "Someone wants to kill you" and "Harry Scotsdale isn't in Sydney, he booked into a hotel in Kensington three days ago".

All the cast acted with impressive confidence and as the suspense built up, the audience was soon paying rapt attention; you could literally have heard a pin drop. I found myself wondering whether the suave Mr Westwood was really a policeman (he was), whether a cup of coffee would be laced with poison (it wasn't) and whether a masked intruder would burst in through the garden door (he did, but within seconds was dead).

Chris Sinclair as the main character (on stage for nearly all the play), Russell Gillman as the other plane passenger, Matt Tylanakis as the rather creepy chef and Martin Roe as a shady millionaire were all particularly convincing, but the others came across effectively too - though Alan Robinson's role as the rapidly dead intruder must be one of the briefest on record!

Perhaps Natasha Bergg as the wife could have been a little more impassioned, Gemma Breakell as the chef's cheated wife a little less mild, Thomas Cobb as the inspector slightly more solid and Angela North as the hotel receptionist rather less stately, but all the cast deserve credit for working together so well to provide a highly entertaining evening.

The play's Director was Elaine O'Sullivan and the backstage team too did an excellent job. The set was realistic and attractive to the eye, and the lighting and sound were of top quality. I lost count of how many times the phone rang but it was always perfectly timed.

To complete the audience's enjoyment, the ticketing, ushers, programme and refreshments were all organised impeccably, as indeed one has come to expect from the Beaufort Players. If you didn't go, you missed a real treat.

John Harrison