

LADY WINDERMERE'S FAN

by Oscar Wilde

20th, 21st & 22nd November 2008

This famous satirical play by Oscar Wilde of manners, morals and secrets requires a large cast capable of portraying Victorian toffs and their ladies. Quite a challenge - but the Beaufort Players certainly rose to the occasion in their highly entertaining production in the Ascension hall on 20th, 21st and 22nd November.

A simple but evocative set - draped curtains and French windows opening onto a terrace - created a true period feel right from the start. This was further enhanced by the first characters to appear - Chris Burns, splendidly grave as the family's butler, and Laura Horandi as their demure maid. Both clearly understood their place in the social strata. At the other end of the scale, the various lords and ladies displayed effortless superiority throughout, looking totally at home in white tie and tails or sumptuous dresses. And what dresses! The costume team had really come up trumps, making every scene a delight to look at, helped by subtle lighting and make-up.

In the main role, Elaine Sweeney was a tour-de-force as Lady Windermere. Among the others, Kate Martin nearly stole the show as the haughty Duchess of Berwick; no wonder her daughter, Lady Agatha played by Vicky Prior, seemed so cowed. Matthew Tylianakis looked and sounded just right as Lord Windermere, as did Esther Holt as Mrs Erlynne. Thomas Cobb was always convincing as Lord Darlington, while Russell Gillman (Mr Dumby) was so languid that he must surely have been a member of the Bullingdon Club. Jayne Bowman (Lady Plymdale) excelled in her facial expressions. And everyone knew their lines throughout - no mean feat!

Full marks to Elaine O'Sullivan, the Director, and Sylvia Hennen, the Assistant Director, for getting everyone to look and move so convincingly. The hall's small stage never seemed overcrowded and everything flowed very naturally. Posture, flirting, the desperate concern to keep up appearances - it was all so very Victorian.

The music was well chosen too, though Lady Windermere's birthday ball seemed a rather faint affair. Obviously we could not expect to see the dancing in full swing, but hearing chatter and much more of the music, especially at the opening of the scene, would have heightened the atmosphere for the intriguing that followed.

And at the end it would have been nice to have had more than one curtain call, especially as the final tableau was so rich to look at and the audience, at least on the Saturday evening, in no hurry to stop applauding.

As always, the actors were well supported by their off-stage colleagues, from the box-office team to the refreshment sellers. And the programme was attractive and informative.

Altogether it was excellent entertainment (great value too at only £7 a ticket) and certainly whetted one's appetite for the group's next production, "The Titfield Thunderbolt", on 2nd, 3rd and 4th April. One of the famous Ealing film comedies, it involves trains so will certainly test their inventiveness.

John Harrison