



Society : Beaufort Players
Production : Daisy Pulls It Off
Date : 25th July 2009
Venue : Beaufort Hall, Ealing
Report by : Sam Webb

Report

After your last offering I was looking forward to visiting Beaufort Players for a second time, this time to enjoy 'Daisy Pulls It Off' and as expected I wasn't disappointed. In what seems to be a regular element of the design the auditorium was decorated, suitably complimented with girls playing games and selling programmes, a nice touch. With the audience almost expecting this you could have extended this interaction, perhaps the Headmistress could have greeted the audience at the door commenting on their appearance. The preset, displayed a black bow, it can be nice to light something on the stage before the show, it can show thought and give the audience a signifier to what they may expect. For example you could have a hockey stick on the wall which has a special on it.

Your stage extension obviously really helps the stage to feel bigger and give you more practice room to work with, however with the stage blocks being wood coloured, it therefore didn't fit in line with the rest of your black box set design. Perhaps a coloured stage cloth or even painting the blocks may have helped the aesthetic. I seem to remember in my last review I mentioned the use of video projection; an idea would have been to use a small projection on your black board stage left, you could have written the title of the play at the beginning and used it throughout the play in lessons and the like.

It may also have been a nice touch to have your pre-show announcement pre-recorded in character, for example the headmistress could have said something like 'all phones will be confiscated if found on students'. A comical set up can get the audience in the mood.

The direction of the piece was very strong, blocking was good with pleasant shapes created on stage, never was a Character blocked by another. The entire worked as a very strong ensemble, focus was intense, this was apparent from the first view of the girls where they all stood proud. Generally the transitions from scene to scene were well choreographed with an accomplished sense on speed, well covered with movement and a good voice or moment of sound effect. There was some good attention to detail and use of the mime and movement, on the train for instance, where the cast correctly swayed and bumped to create a nice effect. Perhaps when the classroom changed from Miss Granville's class to Scobrowski's, the class could have all picked up their stools, in unison turn to face the opposite diagonal then placed them down, with a lighting change, displaying a 'change of classroom/teacher' to the audience. The giggling between Sybil and her accomplices could have been made more genuine if it was a tad subtler in order to make it resemble a more realistic situation, the interaction as it was presented was more of a distraction than a counter balanced reaction. The set had been well conceived with thought; it was practical and looked professional. The pictures which were hung on the wall may have benefited from a matt, rather than gloss finish as the light reflected on them made them at times, impossible to see. Placing and blocking had been well thought out, using proxemics well, for example, when Daisy and Trixie were looking for the treasure, with one upstage and one downstage, it created a good dimensional aesthetic. Congratulations to your director **Gary Burgess** assisted by **Krystyna Kobiak**.

I felt lighting was used with good effect throughout, subtly but a cue was rarely missed or too early apart from at the very start of the show. I did think that the lights could have been integrated into the performance with greater effect, for example when Daisy (or any other characters) were talking to the audience, they could have been lit on their own, and then when the speech finished a full stage wash could have returned. I do realise though that this would have quadrupled your LX cues, and made your technical rehearsal very long and tedious! A couple of transitions needed some extra light, in the beginning where Daisy put on her coat and was setting out for school and in act 2 where Daisy was fidgeting in bed being ill more light was needed. Remember don't abandon the transitions! When the cast were downstage towards the start of Act 2, their faces had shadows on, perhaps some foot lights could have cured this. Well done to **Pete Balls** and **Thom Cobb** on a good operation and design.

Props used by those on stage were all appropriate, however a couple of nit picks – when the girls were tucking in to ‘buns’ they were in fact eating cakes, I also noticed the inconsistency of the school crest, the one on the wall: different from the one on the music books and English books.

Sound was also used with great effectiveness and operation with professionalism thanks to **Roger Dishley**, both at transitions points and throughout scenes, all were delivered on cue and the amplification was at a suitable level and always appropriate. Maybe one suggestion; some background noise in the hockey scene; a sound effect or event music may have added further tension to the piece.

Costumes also looked professional and were in context and well looked after.

The Headmistress’ speech delivered by **Sylvia Hennen**, was well projected, but for future reference, light and shade in the dialogue could be nice; it was after all being read off the page. **Rachel Thorn** excelled in her portrayal of the intellectual student. The audience warmed to the bubbly interpretation of the character, an incredibly well constructed performance conveying her class with pride and charm and confidence accompanied with a suitably small amount of arrogance. Daisy’s dialogue used emphasis well, however, a few moments were missed. More emphasis; ‘**must** win this scholarship’ would have deepened our understanding of her determination. The differentiation between addressing the audience and addressing the cast could at a few points been more defined. Towards the end of the play, when talking to the cast there were a few parts of the dialogue directed to the audience. The use of pauses was also highly commendable throughout.

Mirroring Daisy’s star performance and at times taking the limelight from her was the truly engaging and professionally characterised **Kate Martin** playing Trixie Martin. Sharp and slick attention to detail in the presentation, the interplay was highly defined and emotions completely conveyed with a sense of humour and ease. Perhaps more emphasis could have been put into Trixie’s tag lines such as ‘Capital’, I felt they just needed more of a push to get the reaction from the audience. (However I am aware the audience was tad tame in the first half on the Saturday evening). Use of facial features, eyes and mouth especially was fantastic.

Sybil Burlington (well acted by **Lisa Morris**), our baddie, who even got booed upon entry has a suitable sense of evil, but didn’t shy away from ensuring diction was clear and that her essential glares and stares towards other characters were executed with precision. The final speech in assembly was well thought out and delivered. Well done.

Charlie Froomberg and **Gemma Breakell** made not only a very talented acting duo but also a good set of prefects; their characters highlighting everyone else’s downfalls and exaggerating their perfections with their ‘proper’ attitudes towards the school. This was portrayed both through their vocal work, interaction with the other characters (and the audience) and their physical stances when standing and moving around on stage. The scene where Clare reminisced of her earlier school days was delivered well. However at times there could have been further interpretation in your movements as they seemed restrictive. However a good contrast was created when portraying fun and the authority as a prefect.

Another character who oozed warmth and professionalism in her performance was **Amy Jackson** playing Belinda Mathieson, her willingness as a student always conveyed with truth and her voice work good. She had a good awareness of the stage and the audience. A very good stage presence. Dora Johnston played by **Vicky Prior** was a nice addition to the group, delivering with confidence and presence. I did feel at time some of the delivery felt ‘directed’ and if the actress were to relax into the role it would flow more easily. **June Burgess** playing Monica Smithers, relaxed in to her role with good interplay between other characters and the audience. Detail in the interpretation was well crafted.

Lindsey Anne Cumming playing 2 characters did so with effectiveness, however the volume of projection could have been raised. **Laura Horandi** also played her role with effectiveness as did **Elaine Cobb**, who although she had a smaller role undertook it with efficiency. Another efficient cast member was **Russell Gillman** as Mr Crickmore who ensured the set was in the correct place and was correctly set.

Alan Robinson, had put together an incredibly gender-bending performance, which was affectionately played with passion and a great deal of subtlety, it was fantastic to see a man portraying a woman without over playing it and playing the role with such refinement rather than eccentricity and bolsh. The scene when Daisy was disciplined created a good amount of tension however I feel there was room for an extension of the anger and raised voice, perhaps a change of posture could have also deepened the intensity. The other teachers were also conveyed very well, **Jayne Bowman** as Miss Granville played a stern and strict teacher, dialogue was good, perhaps further light and shade in some of the dialogue would have refined the sense of discipline which she was trying to implement, but other than that it was a nice performance including some good reactions in the end assembly. **Paulo Ribeiro** as Mr Scoblowski used an accent with authenticity, however at times the speed of delivery had a negative effect on our understanding. However the character was clear, if the characterisation could have had some added comedy detail this could have added an amusing dimension to the dialogue. **Neena Kapoor** as Mademoiselle played a cameo with effectiveness and humour. **Angela North** who helped to create the ensemble sang with pride during the assembly scenes.

Mr Thompson spoke with passion and elegance when he finally revealed his true identity, a good presence and acting with ease.

The cast continually showed their professionalism and focus, in assembly time more than any other, accompanied by some tuneful singing, these large scenes are to be commended. The discovery of the 'Hairy star' was also played with conviction, honesty and excitement.

Well done to a very talented performance and another high standard presentation.

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