



Society : BEAUFORT PLAYERS
Production : "THE CLINK"
Date : 30 July 2011
Venue : Church of the Ascension Hall, Ealing
Report by : Stephen Macvicar

Report

Thank you very much for inviting me to Beaufort Players production of "The Clink" recently at the Church of the Ascension Hall in Ealing. Thanks to Elaine O'Sullivan for arranging my ticket and to the cast and crew etc who made me very welcome on the afternoon itself.

Synopsis

The year is 1603, at the very end of Queen Elizabeth's reign, the place South London's red light district. Here are the brothels, here are the disreputable inns, and here is the Clink, the infamous prison that quite a few of the play's characters will get to know. The Bodkin Brothers, Lucius and Thomas, are the youngest generation of a dynasty of fools. Thomas is the traditionalist, Lucius is younger and more ambitious. Beatrice, the daughter of the important government official Warburton, wants him to perform in front of an audience of Dutchmen - alone, without Thomas, who leaves him in anger. Lucius' performance ends in the disaster everybody but he himself has foreseen: an adviser to the Queen gets killed, Lucius manages to escape but is recaptured and made the scapegoat for this and another death. From now on he is on his way down and out. Elizabeth has two of his fingers chopped off; then he is sentenced to a year in the Clink for spreading revolutionary propaganda, and even that is not enough. By the end of the play, Elizabeth is dead, succeeded by James I. In the last scene, Lucius is about to learn that the times have changed indeed: he is about to undergo the most sophisticated form of punishment yet.

NODA London Magazine

A highly ambitious project to undertake on the stage of a church hall but Beaufort put on a remarkable show. The somewhat basic facilities of the venue and a relatively sparse matinee audience belied the quality that we were about to witness. The Clink is a very strange play which has some very crude and graphic moments yet is extremely witty in equal amount. The cast had no obvious weak links and indeed a few of the major principals were nothing short of excellent.

As mentioned in my summary above, this was on the face of it a very ambitious project for a provincial dramatic society to undertake in the surroundings of a modest church hall. I hadn't seen Beaufort Players before and therefore had no prior knowledge of their professionalism in all aspects of production. Any concerns I made have had on arrival were soon wiped away as soon as the performance commenced. I did feel somewhat sorry for the actors who gave their all in front of a very sparse matinee audience on what was one of the hottest days of the summer. Whilst I can understand why the society would be keen to earn the extra revenue that a matinee provides and to cater for patrons who may prefer to attend during the day, I would have to question whether a matinee is really appropriate for this type of production. Pantomimes and lighter comedies yes but darker material such as this may be less appropriate and viable. Just a thought!

Having said that I thought the production was wonderful. I have to be honest that I didn't do my research before I came with a view to watching it 'fresh'. In hindsight some knowledge would have been of benefit as the story and its permutations are relatively complex. A mixture of languages and local slang vocabulary also added to the mist of the play. The small stage of the church hall was transformed to Elizabethan England and we were welcomed by four rather intimidating skulls on posts with four stairs leading to an extended stage area (Bridge of Skulls) with the addition of smoke for atmosphere. Full use was made of the stage and in particular the black cloths and tabs to cut off various parts of the split stage and allow changes to take place behind. The play has many scenes and I thought the crew and cast worked well as a team to keep the pace and action flowing whilst overcoming a very, very slow curtain.

The play is set in 1603 but was written in the late 1980s and the cross over in language is interesting. The script is crude, graphic and yet contemporary. Despite being extremely morbid and depraved at times, it is essentially a very witty play. There was lots of opportunity for puns, physical humour and indeed an Elizabethan rap which I particularly liked. I would at this point like to congratulate your Director Matt Tylanakis for steering the ship which always looked well-rehearsed with actors in control of their characters. I'm guessing from the programme notes that Matt's enthusiasm added to a strong principal line up were the key to the success of this production. The play was produced by Lisa Gillman and what a tough and thankless task this can be. At times you can feel like a 'gofer' – going for this and going for that and undertaking many of the unpleasant and tedious aspects of the production but I'm sure the cast and the society appreciated Lisa's vast contribution.

Technically, the show went very smoothly given the resources at your disposal. I may be wrong but it appeared as though the sound was only coming from one speaker on stage right. The sound effects were good such as running/dripping water and crows etc. I did detect one minor error when church music came on one scene early but the overall effect worked well. The costumes were impressive and appropriate for the period. There was the odd button flying off and Zanda's red dress was nearly discarded but one or two wardrobe malfunctions apart the costumes were great. Congratulations to the wardrobe team. The props were simple but effective. I particularly liked the gravestones.

There are too many named principals to comment on individually but I have written a few notes on some of lead principals who in several cases played more than one part;

Lucius Bodkin – Craig McCrindle – A strong jester and entertained with his rap. Craig worked well with Thom as a brotherly pair of jesters trying to make their way in the world

Thomas Bodkin – Thom Cobb – Thom was suitably lively in his portrayal of a jester and as mentioned worked well with Craig. I couldn't help but notice that Thom has incredibly knees which are perfect for adding comedy to the part of a jester

Beatrice – Amy Jackson – In my humble opinion, I think Amy's performance was the strongest on display. Amy carried herself very well on stage as the lady-in-waiting and was completely natural in all her mannerisms. The bitchy quality came through in spades and not to mention the spit!

Zanda – Rachel Thorn – Another lively performer – Rachel threw herself into the role with real Moroccan passion – great accent too!

Butler – Kester Worme – A smaller role however Kester was amusing and suitably convincing as the sorcerer and alchemist

Frobisher – Russell Gillman – There was a confidence about Russell which makes me think he is worthy of bigger and more leading parts

Queen Elizabeth – Jane Burgess – Jane was on stage for many long periods without ‘business’. When she did come to life she was on top form in a scary fashion

Hieronymous Bodkin – Matthew Carpenter – Brought back to life and in ghostly appearance, Matthew certainly made his presence felt as the deceased fool!

Warburton – Chris Burns – Acting as what appeared to be a narrator in the early part of the play, Chris had many lines to learn as the villainous Warburton and performed well although he did appear to be searching for lines at times

Bishop / Captain – Martin Perrott – Two very diverse characters but Martin showed great versatility. I particularly liked his OTT Captain which was shades of Rick Mayall as Lord Flashheart in Blackadder and complete with troublesome moustache which added much to the humour

Gridling – Kate Martin – Clearly a lady playing a man but Kate seemed to revel in the challenge. Kate’s costume aligned with make-up gave more than a passing resemblance to Adam Ant – compliment (honest)

Drysdale – Alan Robinson – Alan aged up nicely to be a learned pedant in one of the smaller roles

There were some lovely cameos amongst the smaller players to back up your principals. It was a real team effort and for this society are to be congratulated. Although District 2 is not my own District, I fully expect to nominate this production for a NODA Drama award next summer.

The souvenir programme had an excellent layout and contained plenty of interesting articles – a very enjoyable read altogether. Short biogs and especially photographs are always very welcome as it shows the relevant experience and growth of performers. The photographs were of a high quality.

Once again thank you for inviting me to the Ealing and best wishes for your next production – the intriguingly entitled pantomime ‘Dungerella.

I look forward to seeing you again soon and if I can be of any assistance at any time, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Kindest Regards

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