

## **Beaufort Players: "Bouncers & Shakers"**

Strong language and strong performances were the hallmarks of the Beaufort Players' production of this two-part play in the Ascension Hall on 29, 30 and 31 July. Written by John Godber and Jane Thornton, it was a frank portrayal of the 1980s disco scene, first by four charmless bouncers, then by four perky cocktail waitresses.

The scene was set by bouncers giving the audience the once-over at the entrance where "Are you over 21, madam?" went down particularly well with one of my companions. Inside, the hall was decorated with photos of 1980s icons from Princess Di to JR and the original Eastenders. And references in the plays to such mainstays of the period as Mrs Thatcher, chicken-in-the-basket, C&A and White City dog-racing brought back all sorts of nostalgic memories.

With the bouncers in dinner jackets and a plain black set, the first half was a dark rather relentless affair, full of bragging, bravado and pissing. The cast acted, mimed, sang and danced with talent and gusto, convincingly portraying a myriad of characters of both sexes from camp hairdressers and good-time girls to upper-crust rugby players and a typically incomprehensible DJ. But noisy half-drunk people are never attractive and the vividness of the performances left me feeling more alienated than involved.

The waitresses portrayed a similarly wide range of characters, again of both sexes. In pink bow-ties, crisp white monogrammed shirts, silver belts and black leggings, they certainly looked the part and all gave convincing performances. Appropriately it was a gentler, more profound script than the men's and - a big advantage - gave the audience the chance to get to know the girls as real people, thanks to some moving personal soliloquies covering experiences such as going to college, coping with a dying grandmother and having an abortion.

This half of the evening abandoned the stage for the front of the hall floor which meant that, though only in the third row, I frequently had to crane my neck to see what was going on. I was certainly glad not to be further back.

The 'Bouncers' were played by Matthew Carpenter, Daniel Cawtheray, Craig McCrindle and Chris Sinclair and the 'Shakers' by Gemma Breakell, Charlie Froomberg, Lisa Morris and Rachel Thorn.

All credit too to the directors and producers (all recent graduates of the Beaufort Players' own directing course run by Diana Dishley) for getting plenty of variety and pace into the evening. They were respectively Russell Gillman/June Burgess and Amy Jackson/Kate Martin.

Brisk lighting changes and well-chosen music stings, always impeccably timed, added to the success of the performances which were backed by the Beaufort Players' usual efficient ticketing and front-of-house arrangements including an informative programme. And their publicity flyer for the production was as glossy and eye-catching as anything that emanates from the West End.

*John Harrison*