

SARDINES

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Bouncers / Shakers

John Godber and Jane Thornton

society: Beaufort Players
performance: 31 Jul 2010 | Church of the Ascension Hall, Ealing

reviewed by: The Countess

Mention John Godber's 'Bouncers' to people and what you immediately notice is the diversity of fans that have gathered over the years. Written and updated a few times (presumably to encompass more appropriate social commentaries) 'Bouncers' and 'Shakers' are two of Godber's famous one-act plays. These one-hour specials aim to deliver an entertaining parody of various walks of life, both filled with hilarious characters that chat, flirt and fight their way through drunken, hormone-fuelled nights out.

With so many people telling me how great the plays were (not to mention an arduous ninety minute traffic-filled journey), the Beaufort Players had a tough job to impress ahead of them. I needn't have worried. The enthusiasm of the two debut directors was evident as the cast romped their way through over two hours of '80s excitement. A very enthusiastic audience, obviously well-known to those involved, howled with laughter as each segment developed. But even as an outsider, I could appreciate the assorted characters that we were presented with, often with a believable sincerity that made the audience feel a range of emotions. Despite the laconic nature of the plays, there were some poignant moments – more often seen in 'Shakers' – usually portrayed as spotlighted monologues.

As previously mentioned, both performances were debut directorial pieces for both Russell Gillman ('Bouncers') and Amy Jackson ('Shakers') – two of the Beaufort Players younger members. Their clarity of vision that they had for the plays was obvious and not unaided by the energy and versatility of the cast. All seasoned performers, the pace that these pieces require is daunting and the momentum can be hard to maintain for over an hour without a break. With such a small cast, and in an intimate venue such as the hall in Ealing's Church of the Ascension, it is very easy to become distracted if anyone falls out of character for any reason, so where there is a very stylised scene (for example, the bouncers outside the club) the actors need to be aware of their movements at all times.

The 'Shakers' girls all showed refreshing individuality in the five or so characters they each portrayed. A special mention must also go to Lisa Morris that despite being able to use her native accent, managed to show her impressive acting ability and made Nicki a very naturalistic and likeable character. It was slightly more difficult to define the different male characters as they had decided to use fewer props – and drunken groups of men tend to behave in a very similar manner – often with only their accents distinguishing them! I would have been interested to see some of the 'Bouncers' cast given alternative roles within the play to see if more effective performances could have been established. I wonder if Craig McCrindle might have been a more earnest 'Lucky' Eric, and if Chris Sinclair could have brought his energy to Les? There were a few times when I would have questioned the representation of certain characters, but overall I thought they were portrayed well, giving the audience value for money entertainment wise.

When one sees a lot of theatre, it is often the small things that attract attention. Good acting carries a play along nicely, but there are sometimes niggles that one might get picky about. If I were to be so, I would have to mention the Bouncers' tuxedos. In a play with no costume changes, and the costume being integral to the role, properly matched jackets and trousers would, in my opinion, have looked better. I saw the ease of using mini-handbags, but I wonder if normal sized ones would have helped with the characterisation somewhat.

I felt the stark black stage of 'Bouncers' contrasted well with the glitzy, cocktail-filled 'Shakers' set and agreed with the idea of having it offstage in front of the audience. This enabled you to feel close to the characters, a sentiment they intended to evoke and made the monologues have more impact. It did mean that the audience was quite a distance away for 'Bouncers' but in such a small venue this was not much of an issue. I loved the '80s inspired refreshments and the welcoming front of house party.

Overall I must impress that I thoroughly enjoyed the evening. A valiant attempt from two promising directors - I look forward to returning in November for Michael Frayn's 'Noises Off' but also to see more work by this talented bunch from Ealing.