



Society : Beaufort Players
Production : Tempting Fête
Date : 27 July 2013
Venue : The Church of the Ascension Hall, Beaufort Road, Ealing W5 3EB
Report by : Zena Wigram (District 2)

Report

Yet another delightful production by the extremely talented Beaufort Players made for a most entertaining afternoon. I can only guess how hard director and writer **Alan Robinson** had worked, and he and producer **Krystyna Kobiak** managed to pull off a lot of splendid nonsense. It is a pity that the hall wasn't absolutely packed for the riotous silliness of this play which was much enjoyed by the audience.

My one criticism is that Alan didn't trust his lovely script. I am coming more and more to the opinion that it's helpful to have a director (or even a co-director) who is not the author, and thus able to offer an impartial view for the setting of a play. I suspect someone else would have given more credit to Alan's writing, and therefore reined in the sexual gestures: subtle innuendo is funnier than overt lewdness. I think you'd have had just as amusing a play if some of the actions had been more delicately suggestive, and less vulgar – and you would have been less likely to offend your audience. If people felt uncomfortable bringing an older parent – or a child – along, I think you could risk alienating some of the potential audience for future productions, which would be a real shame. For example, the vicar's flick to get the button on his trousers to fly off was very clever, and Rosemary's kneeling before him for a moment would have been enough: we didn't need the lengthy rocking. Miss Starkgirdle's reactions would have been even more amusing if there'd been a little doubt as to what she'd seen and thus a bit of wondering whether she was jumping to smutty conclusions without reason.

That aside, this was a super farce, with extremely well-rehearsed slapstick, and clever use of the space in the hall. The scene with the trestle's collapse was magnificent chaos; the escape of Farmer Stoutbottom's bullocks (*note to self – check spelling*) at the end of Act I was great fun, and the clever ending was most satisfying, particularly as I had no idea how Alan was going to reconcile all the complicated manoeuvring.

The large cast had worked extraordinarily hard on lines and actions and the play was a real credit to their teamwork.

Tania Hunt did a good job as the slightly demented heroine Cathy Droop; she just started off a bit too fast in her challenging opening scene – later, when she paced herself a little better, she was lovely. **Séin Ó Muineacháin**, as her bewildered but loving husband Peter, was excellent; there was a super relationship between them right from the start.

June Burgess was very convincing as the bossy Rosemary Withering Bore, watching her world disintegrate; she was clear and thoroughly consistent, with a performance I enjoyed very much. **Jayne Bowman**'s Olivia Woodcock was also very good – her response to the trestle's collapse was particularly splendid in a lovely performance. **Kate Martin** did well with the not-particularly-easy part of the dippy Miss Starkgirdle: is it appropriate to say that her death at the end was a triumphant ending to the afternoon?

Gemma Robinson was delightful as Miss Goodbody, innocently causing chaos with her bunting. She managed to look utterly unselfconscious in the shorts and cropped top which showed off her most attractive shape, so her suggestive lines were all the funnier. (I just felt she wore a trifle too much heavy

make-up for the 'innocent abroad' – and bright blue eyeshadow is seldom flattering. All the rest of the make-up by **Gabriela Ardeleanu, Kate Daniels** and **Nadia Fung** was spot-on.)

Paul Miglentsis made a very believable smooth-talking charmer JT Withering (I did enjoy the revelation of his real name: much better than Endeavour Morse), though I felt that some of his very pointed looks were just a trifle overdone. **Martin Perrot** had a challenge as the ubiquitous Reverend Pole, but I felt he was a little too camp. It stretched the imagination a trifle to think that his tight trousers causing quite such determined mincing, and his limp-wristed hand gestures were very hard to reconcile with his pursuit of Miss Goodbody, and with Miss Starkgirdle's reactions to the suggestive situations in which he found himself.

Matt Tylanakis was consistent as the long-suffering Randal Bore, and **Russell Gillman** was a lovely loud Major Thwack, only occasionally a little bit too hammy. The bucolic duo of Fanny Haddock (**Elaine O'Sullivan**) and Farmer Stoutbottom (**Chris Burns**) looked fabulous, and Elaine worked hard to get her words across despite her heavy accent. Unfortunately, Chris, with a far harder task to get his nonsense lines understood, was severely hampered by his thick accent. Perhaps voice coach **Kitty Martin** was aiming for authenticity, but the unfortunate result was that I heard almost nothing he said. It's a balance: if you do a well-known play, you absolutely have to get every line exactly right, because of the number of people who know what it should be; whereas if you do a play no-one knows, you have to make sure every word is crystal clear, because no-one in the audience has any idea what's coming next. **Thomas Cobb** as P.C. Plucker was another character with an accent which got in the way of his lines – fortunately, his accent faded later and it became much easier to understand what he was saying as he threw his constabulary weight around with - and without - his trousers.

I would guess that **Diana Dishley** had her work cut out during rehearsals, but during the performance there was no hint of any need for her services on continuity. On the other hand, **Alan Robinson, Thom Cobb, Krystyna Kobiak, Elaine O'Sullivan** (props) had a great deal of work to do with all the cakes, macaroons, cream and other bits and pieces – and lots of clearing up between performances!

The costumes (and the beer tent, also, I understand, made for the production) by **Krystyna Kobiak** and **Elaine Cobb** were excellent. The three cake ladies' floral dresses with matching aprons were particularly delightful and the removable trousers were most impressive. (Congratulations to the brave gents prepared to spend quite so much time in their underpants.)

Roger Dishley produced a range of well-timed sound effects (though I didn't think the dog's gobbling noise was necessary), especially the gunshot and the noisy car alarm. **Jane Quill** and **Pete Balls** (lighting and special effects) gave us lovely clear daylight (that seems so easy but is often disappointing, even in large theatres with huge lighting rigs) and a truly splendid exploding barrel – which didn't disappoint after the long build-up to it.

Stage Manager **Vicky Prior** and construction crew **Thom Cobb, Chris Burns**, and the Beaufort Builders had created a lovely village green, with a tricky descending banner and a most impressive stile – really sturdy and with not a hint of wobble, despite the number of characters who clambered or leapt over it.

As always, we had a well produced programme, this time with an insert of the *Daily Wallop*, by **Russell Gillman** and **Esther Holt**, which cleverly prepared us for the silliness to follow, giving a clear background without giving away the plot. Thank you to **Roger Dishley** and **Jane Quill** your warm welcome – and to the team behind the bar for the excellent refreshments.

Zena Wigram
District 2