



Society : Beaufort Players
Production : Lettice and Lovage
Date : 27 March 2014
Venue : The Church of the Ascension Hall, Beaufort Road, Ealing W5 3EB
Report by : Zena Wigram (District 2)

Report

Thank you for allowing me to see this super play, and for the (usual) warm welcome from **Roger** and **Diana Dishley**. As usual, Beaufort Players gave us a most enjoyable evening, so congratulations to Director **Krystyna Kobiak** and Producer **Alan Robinson**.

This play stands or falls by the two leading ladies, and **Tania Holt** as Lotte and **Jane Quill** as Lettice were a super contrast in voices, movements and characters, while both had excellent projection and articulation and built sympathy for both women beautifully. They also worked together very well. While Jane was not 100% on top of all the words on opening night (I'm afraid it was the only performance I could make), **Elaine O'Sullivan** was really slick on continuity, supporting with a quick prompt when required, and the small glitches didn't spoil our enjoyment because Jane stayed right in character.

They were excellently supported by reliable **Gemma Robinson**, who was a lovely nice-but-dim Miss Framer, and **Séin Ó Muineacháin**, who was delightful as lawyer Mr Bardolf. The slight hints of Ireland in his voice just added depth to his discomfort at Lettice's revelations. In particular the trio's physical comedy in Act 3 was an absolute triumph, with a lovely light touch: a really beautifully done example of real teamwork, enjoyed by the whole audience. I would only have liked the final freeze to have lasted just a beat more – and perhaps ended with a toast?

Congratulations, too, on the very clever set design and construction by your hard-working chairman **Thom Cobb** and **Alan Robinson** (also producing and doing stage management and poster artwork) and the Beaufort Builders. The scenery for the first two acts suffered a little from the size of the not-very-big stage – it was a shame there was no banister on the staircase which was a bit narrow for a 'grand' feature – perhaps having the stairs go off into the wings with black legs might have been better? I did enjoy the panelling and heavy velvets, as well as the cleverly 'roped off' tapestry, but having the cast squeeze through the narrow opening in the curtains stage left made the 'grand hall' a trifle hard to believe. It was a sensible compromise to keep the tapestry for the clever quick scenery change to the office (with a lovely sturdy filing cabinet for the tea tray), but it was a shame that part of the staircase was still visible.

However, that you managed to fit all three scenes onto the stage was a tremendous feat in itself, and the fabulous Act III flat with its impressive décor was truly excellent. The raised outside pavement was remarkable, allowing us to see Lotte's shoes as she walked to and fro above the door, and I admired the three opening doors including the reversed number '19' above the external door, splendid stuffed moose and even coving on the ceiling.

Director **Krystyna Kobiak** had done the costumes too, which were generally excellent, including the startling red dress with the golden crowns. However there were some inconsistencies. Miss Framer described Lettice's outfit as unusual, but the big black cloak wasn't particularly striking, and I was curious why Lotte had two smart work suits but only one blouse. It was a shame that the tourists, including **Angela North**, **Sarah Turner**, and **Russell Gillman** (a lovely cameo), had so far to travel down the stairs off and round – it worked for the action but meant they had only seconds for their costume changes – and I felt that there were some missed opportunities to use

wigs, scarves and hats. For instance, although changes in seasons were clear, with summer and winter wear, the same coat buttoned and unbuttoned over the same dress didn't really suggest a different tourist. I also wasn't quite convinced about the smartphone photography, because it placed the play firmly in the recent past, but later we had a character not much over 30 saying she remembered the 50s and 60s, and some splendid laughs in Act III about the lawyer's use of the cassette recorder.

Krystyna had also, with **Russell Gillman**, done the programme – Beaufort Players people really do know how to work hard! It was interesting and informative, and I did enjoy the 'official souvenir guide'. My only tiny criticism: saying 'a short interval' was a trifle confusing when there were in fact two intervals.

Make-up by **Gabriela Ardeleanu** was good for everyone, especially a lovely marked contrast between Lettice and Lotte, and good bruises on Lotte later. I felt Tania could have done with a few more hair grips on her first wig – rather than her having to keep poking at it. Removing it was a great moment and the grey hair (which can't have been easy to sort out under a wig, particularly on so young and attractive an actress) was very convincing. I must confess, however, that I prefer not to see the cast in make-up front of house after the show – it spoils the illusion and suggests that this is a 'village hall' company, which the standard of your productions most certainly does not.

Kate Martin and **Eileen Laird** had sourced a most astonishing collection of props, including swords over the mantel in Act III, a scarily solid executioner's block, and a cat with moving head but rather rusty miaow noise (I think asking the multi-talented Roger for an effect might have been better) – I'd been concerned that Lettice left with the poor animal still presumably shut away so was glad to see it featured in the curtain calls.

Dare I say 'as usual' when remarking that lighting and sound were excellent? Lighting by **Pete Balls** was utterly perfect and unobtrusive, and the scene change music was very carefully chosen, and played at a good volume without distortion by **Roger Dishley**, from Elizabethan (and not boring old Greensleeves) at the start to triumphant Handel at the end of Act II and a super musical 'Gloria' to end the play.

Thank you again for a lovely evening of entertainment, enjoyed by all of your appreciative audience. I wish you all the best with July's production of 'A Midsummer Night's Dream'.

Zena Wigram
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