

National Operatic & Dramatic Association London Region

The logo for NODA (National Operatic & Dramatic Association) is written in a blue, cursive, lowercase font.

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Society : Beaufort Players
Production : Yes, Prime Minister
Date : 22 July 2015
Venue : Church of the Ascension Hall, Ealing
Report by : Zena Wigram, district 2

[Show Report](#)

Thank you for inviting me to this lively evening of fun, very well directed by **Elaine O’Sullivan** and produced by the multi-talented **Krystyna Kobiak**.

The script included some lovely bon mots much enjoyed by all the cast, and most appropriate mockery of politicians. While it is less subtle than the TV series, and it’s a little old post-coalition (and the euro/sterling and global warming jokes wore a bit thin), there were still some tremendously apt comments, including the discussions about the role of the BBC. I did enjoy the fact that almost the first thing I saw on Monday was the news that our government is considering the appointment of a ‘late payments czar’...!

All the cast gave us clear and audible dialogue, with brisk cueing in - and I heard no use whatsoever of prompt **Diana Dishley**, despite some very tricky sections. Despite this, Act I sc 2 dragged a little – a number of people agree that the original professional run lacked pace, so this was clearly due to the writing: I just wondered whether it might have been possible to have people talking over the top of one another at times to make it a little brisker?

The cast worked hard to listen and respond to everything, and there were super reactions throughout, particularly by the men listening to Claire’s conversation on the phone, and the responses by Claire and Bernard to the PM’s prayer. Everyone coped very well with the applause and laughter – well done! - especially as that is hard to rehearse, and different every performance. Unlike a professional cast, who would have had weeks of previews to get used to the laughter, you plunged straight in, and I was most impressed. Bernard and Sir Humphrey needed something to do during some of their long speeches, particularly during Act I sc 1 – with full appreciation for the challenges involved in remembering lines, I think they could have been checking their phones, shifting papers about, lining up coasters on the coffee table, moving cushions on the chairs, packing red boxes or even tapping at a laptop, so they weren’t just standing or sitting still delivering speeches out front.

Matthew Tylanakis as Sir Humphrey and **Martin Perrott** as Jim Hacker had a huge challenge which they met triumphantly. Within minutes of their entries their super characterisations had made us forget the original TV actors, and they managed the complex script with aplomb. Matthew managed the sesquipedalian speeches beautifully: he’d really thought them through and every word had meaning, and he also had an excellent physical presence – I particularly enjoyed his raised eyebrows. Martin was a super contrast to him, in character and physical appearance, with a great whinge, and his facial responses were delightful throughout. **Russell Gillman** suffered somewhat because although he was as convincing as possible as private secretary Bernard, the part isn’t especially well-written. However, he too had golden moments, and his clichéd responses to the questions from the BBC’s press office by searching through the files was very funny indeed.

Tania Hunt was great fun as no-nonsense policy advisor Claire Sutton – passionate about finding a solution and doing the wrong thing at nearly every turn. Tania is astonishing in her chameleon-like ability to be utterly different every time I see her on stage, and she managed to be believable even in the most outrageous nonsense about the illegal immigrant cook's daughter. **Peter Fullagar** enjoyed the role of the camp but wily Kumranistan ambassador who really knew how to do political manoeuvring. One of many lovely moments was when the others tried to make their outfits more casual to match his outrageous nightwear.

Karen Gundersen did well as the feisty director general of the BBC starting inviolable and then giving in to the threats. **Diana Dishley's** newsreader and **Gemma Robinson's** BBC press officer were reliable and appropriate, and well done to **April Parker** for her perfectly-timed alerts – sometimes having a tiny bit to do where the timing is critical can be more nerve-wracking than having to give a long speech! As presenter Simone, **Frances Thomson** had lovely rounded BBC vowels. While it was clear how frustrating she found the prime minister's not answering her questions, perhaps she might have made it a little more subtle, smiling sweetly at camera and then raising her eyes to heaven when not on air? Do avoid crossing your legs when you sit on stage, ladies: in a long skirt it spoils the line, and if you're wearing a short skirt, think about where the audience's eyeline is....

Costumes and make-up, by **Krystyna Kobiak** and the cast, were all suitable and I appreciated the marked contrast between the monochrome of the politicians (with just the pink tie for the PM's television interview) and the bright colours of the BBC staff, including red glasses for Jenny Burnham that matched her vibrant jacket. It occurred to me that Russell's characterisation wasn't helped by the fact that physically he looks fairly similar to Martin: I wonder whether they might have worn suits that were less similar in colour and cut?

April Parker and **Philip Hazeley** had sourced appropriate props, including a super giant (silly) pipeline map. The beautifully-built set, designed by **Thomas Cobb** and **Alan Robinson** and constructed by them with **Chris Burns**, had solid well-fitting double doors and a properly decorated 'corridor' behind them. The photos on the walls were amusing and the red boxes, furniture, wood panelling, opening window and curtains were all perfect – although the red boxes did seem rather light for files supposedly stuffed full of paperwork.

Russell Gillman and **Krystyna Kobiak** had created a clean and neatly laid out official manifesto (programme) with a most effective photograph on the front.

Roger Dishley's sound included chirpy Westminster chimes-type music and a splendid thunderstorm, though I'd have had someone close the window on the storm as soon as possible, so that the rain and wind could stop for a reason, rather than having to have them fade out – it was done as subtly as possible, but it was still obvious, I'm afraid. Lighting by **Pete Balls** and **Jane Quill** was completely unobtrusive (other than appropriate lightning flashes) and changed according to the time of day.

Thank you for the lovely warm welcome from **Roger Dishley, Diana Dishley, Elaine O'Sullivan** and **Jayne Bowman**. As usual with Beaufort Players, this production had a tremendously positive team feeling as well as a thoroughly professional attitude to giving the audience the best theatre experience possible. It seemed to me that you'd sold more tickets than usual, which I hope is an indication that more and more people are starting to spread the word about your high standards. I hope your audience continues to grow and wish you the best of luck with *Wind in the Willows*.

Zena Wigram
District 2