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Society : Beaufort Players
Production : The Thrill of Love
Date : Spring 2017
Venue : Church of the Ascension Hall, Ealing
Report by : Zena Wigram, district 2

[Show report](#)

Thank you for the opportunity to enjoy an evening of high quality theatre, and for the lovely warm welcome from the team, especially Diana and Roger Dishley.

Director Krystyna Kobiak and Producer Ana Bretes had clearly worked together extremely well; between them they delivered a thought-provoking play with first-class attention to detail throughout. The dialogue – with solid consistent accents - was meaningful, with good variations in pace. (It might have been worth finding a choreographer for the brief dance scene, which was more a vague shuffle than a lively indication of Ruth's zest for life.) The direction brought out the humour of the lighter moments, and a tribute to the excellent ensemble work is that, despite the fact that we all knew the ending, Ruth's execution was shocking and very sad.

Kate Martin proved her versatility with an accomplished performance in the challenging role of Ruth Ellis, from the light-hearted early days, full of high hopes, to the woeful ending, devastated by heartbreak and domestic violence. In particular the scene after her miscarriage, when she defended the boyfriend who'd caused it, was very powerful and beautifully done, gradually revealing the extent of his abuse - she really made it ring true.

I also really enjoyed Elene Hadjidaniel's skilful performance as no-nonsense Sylvia Shaw. She had a delightfully expressive face and made every look count, in a super characterisation of the cynical yet ultimately sympathetic club owner. Gemma Breakell was delightfully stupid (and looked the part perfectly) as aspiring model Valerie Mewes / Vickie Martin. Charlie Froomberg did her best with the rather bland character of kindly charlady Doris; her broom-pushing could have done with a little more energy, especially when her boss walked in, for someone described as a 'good worker'.

Alan Robinson (Inspector Gale) gave a beautifully consistent portrayal of the detective who knows Ruth committed murder, but wants to understand why: both when involved with the other characters and when breaking the fourth wall to address the audience. I really liked his accent, and his growing desperation towards the end.

Ana Bretes, Thomas Cobb and Alan Robinson had designed a set which allowed for the numerous locations, the main one being a very attractive Court Club office cum lounge. The plotting took advantage of the whole area and the hall's entrances and exits were used imaginatively.

Stage manager Ana Bretes co-ordinated efficient, quick and quiet scene shifting - though I would have suggested music over the scene changes rather than silence, particularly as the Billie Holliday soundtrack was so attractive and effective elsewhere. At other times, the gramophone static was a little intrusive under some of the dialogue: cast, when you have dialogue over background sound, you do have to speak up, and even more so if you're talking sideways towards the wings!

The lighting was superb: atmospheric where required and illuminating particular parts of the set for different scenes. In particular, I really liked the snow on the actors' shoulders combined with the lighting effect to show the wintry cemetery. The perfectly co-ordinated 1950s-type camera flashbulb light and sound effects were outstanding: I wondered if there was indeed a flashbulb, it was so well timed! The way the hanging was managed with sound and lighting was most effective. The props were excellent throughout, including the record player and a whisky bottle with a cork that made a most satisfactory popping sound.

Costumes, make-up and hair were authentic and attractive, thanks to Krystyna Kobiak, Vicky Voller, Angie White and Elia Buonafine. Ruth, Sylvia and Vickie's costumes were all superb – I made a particular note that Sylvia's dresses, hairstyle and jewellery all really supported her characterisation. I really liked Vickie's glamour, most appropriate to the aspiring model, and Ruth's entire look was absolutely perfect, from her blue slip to her glasses, particularly the bruises on her arms, subtly added to later. The only amendments you might have considered were rather more dowdy clothes and make-up for Doris – at times she looked remarkably fashionable, and her first dress was surprisingly low cut – and she would have benefited from some clips for her hair, because her constant pushing at it was quite distracting. Jack's suit jacket was a little too big for him, and he should have worn a hat outdoors. I do suggest you should keep make-up and costume backstage and change into 'normal' clothes before coming out to greet your admiring audience. Appearing in costume but out of character afterwards suggests a 'village hall' attitude, which is belied by the very high standards of your production.

The programme by Russell Gillman and Krystyna Kobiak was absolutely packed with interesting information, making it a really good read!

This was a bit of a departure from most of the plays I've seen Beaufort Players present, and it was most definitely a success. Despite the 7pm start (or perhaps because of it?) the hall was packed, and it was great to see so large an audience enjoying a really good evening of theatre.

Zena Wigram
District 2