

National Operatic & Dramatic Association London Region



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Society : Beaufort Players
Production : Don't Dress for Dinner
Date : 24 March 2018
Venue : Church of the Ascension Hall, Ealing
Report by : Zena Wigram, district 2

[Show report](#)

General

By maintaining a brisk pace, your talented cast managed to gloss over the inconsistencies in this sequel to *Boeing Boeing*, and present a lively and enjoyable evening, with production values as high as we've come to expect from Beaufort Players. The production had been carefully thought through, and was delivered smartly enough to help us ignore the absurdities in the nonsensical plot and enjoy the characters, despite their shallowness.

Players

As Bernard, Alan Robinson's vignette at the start with his preparations for Suzanne's arrival was superb, and – perhaps not surprisingly – his reconciliation at the end with Gemma Robinson's Jacqueline was very natural. He is too nice a person to get right inside the skin of an arrogant misogynist (!) but he worked hard at being hot-headed and aggressive to help us believe that he'd scared best friend Robert. There were times when I noticed a tendency to poke his head forward, which made him appear unbalanced and less confident. Gemma was delightful as the wronged but scheming wife, and moved seamlessly from cheerful about her weekend away to simmering jealousy. Her final series of "I see. No, I don't" was very funny indeed.

Lucy Fraser (Suzanne) looked every inch the model when she arrived, from her sleek hair to her gorgeous shoes, and then degenerated splendidly into considerable disarray after her struggles in the kitchen. The dialogue on the sofa with Jacqueline was most amusing, and I hope for his sake that her wholly convincing slapping of Bernard was less hard than it looked!

Peter Fullagar (Robert) had a lovely range of facial expressions, and a super focus: his performance got better and better as the play went on. The way he demonstrated Robert's fear of Bernard was impressive, overcoming the fact that Alan is actually a fair bit slighter than he is.

Georgina Saunders (Suzette) definitely had the best lines in the play as the scheming minx who took advantage of each new plot twist – and, with her cheeky smile, made the most of them. While she

was far more attractive than noted in the script (!) that was hardly a disadvantage to her performance, or the play as a whole.

As her scary husband George, Grae Minors was appropriately aggressive and succeeded in making even his silliest lines of dialogue sound sincere. There was only one place when his attractive American accent was hard to reconcile with the English translation: 'blooming' ('all over the blooming place') sounded very odd, and I wondered whether he might have considered 'forgetting' that particular word.

His battle with Robert and Bernard was managed quickly enough that George's being subdued by the three girls worked pretty well, despite his physique, although I did wonder whether they might all have landed on top of him, or twisted an arm behind his back to look a little more in control?

Everyone in the cast coped very well in adapting the pauses around the laughter generated by the silliness, stayed very focused, and achieved audible dialogue while maintaining the momentum of the piece.

Direction

Director Diana Dishley, with the help of assistant director Jane Quill, had set a lovely production of a not-especially easy play. Farce is difficult to get right and this was very well managed, particularly the timing, and a lively variety of tone, volume and pace.

There was a good flow of movement about the whole stage area, and clever setting of entrances and exits neatly covered any slight hiatus which might have been caused by exits to the kitchen. Consistent acting of the front door was helped by well synchronised sound effects and allowed good use of the central aisle of the auditorium without adding any sight-line issues.

Stage management, lighting, sound, props

Ana Bretes and Thom Cobb had designed and constructed a minimal but effective set, using black curtains, a whitewashed wall behind the steps up to the bedroom, and appropriate furniture. I did enjoy the pig and cow cushions on the sofa, subtly supporting the script. Appropriate props by Maira O'Beirne included various drinks on the sturdy and well-placed bar, a marvellously effective soda siphon and a lot of banknotes (generally handed over by poor Robert). Suzanne's improvised 'gong' (and good work coping with its unexpected destruction!) was much funnier than having a real one would have been.

Pete Balls and Jane Quills had designed and managed clear and helpful lighting, covering all the entrances and exits, including those through the auditorium and in front of the apron to the kitchen,

while leaving the audience in darkness. That must have been quite tricky but you made it look totally natural.

Roger Dishley's clever and appropriate music choices (yet again) amused those members of the audience who recognised the tunes, and his arrangements of 'Don't Dress for Dinner' deserved their own round of applause. I've already mentioned the front door knocking; all the phone calls were just as well timed.

Costumes, hair, make-up

All the costumes worked well, although the hem of Jacqueline's lovely pink cocktail dress was uneven, and it would have looked better with a slip. One of Bernard's numerous shirts looked a bit big for him – a stitch to shorten the sleeves at the cuff would have helped. Georgina Saunders had created the much-discussed Chanel coat (with large and legible label) which was really perfect, and there was a good contrast in underwear for the women, while the men had (almost) matching pyjamas and bedroom slippers. Talented Krystyna Kobiak had created a marvellous pair of contrasting waitress outfits – Suzanne looked an awful mess in Act 2, although her constant pushing at the waitress's head-piece was a little distracting – and Suzette's skirt to tube dress was a triumph: the action beautifully managed by the two men. Hair and make-up were spot-on throughout.

Front of house and programme

The informative programme by Russell Gillman, Vicky Prior and Krystyna Kobiak had appropriate faces on clever cartoon bodies to reflect the general silliness of the play, and a clean and coherent design.

From Elaine's invitation and Krystyna and Thom's welcome (and an excellent cup of tea – thanks, Lainy and Kate) right through to the bows at the end, the Beaufort team presented another worthwhile evening of theatre – thank you!

Zena Wigram
District 2

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