



The Beaufort Players Drama Group,

performance date: 27 Nov 2019

venue: Church of the Ascension Hall, Beaufort Road, Ealing W5 3EB

Reviewer : Andrea Richardson

‘Handbagged’

I was pleased to return to Beaufort Players for their latest production, Handbagged. This 2013 play by Moira Buffini examines the relationship between Queen Elizabeth II and Margaret Thatcher during her term as Prime Minister. This is a comedic and maybe not totally fictional look at the 11-year course of meetings that took place between the Prime Minister and the Queen, and gives us stark reminders of the IRA bombings, Poll Tax riots, and Falklands War (amongst many historical events) which marked their time working together.

This battle of wills between these two powerful women is presented in a play that tests the limits of tolerance and compassion. We are given two versions of each lady – one younger and one older. The joke is that the Queen, the very embodiment of a hierarchical society, is the empathetic one opposite a Thatcher who is humourless and doctrinaire.

The double perspective is enhanced with two male actors – simply called Actor 1 and Actor 2. This pair provide essential links between events and a foil to the leading ladies.

Older Margaret Thatcher was played most excellently by Jane Quill. She had the low tone of voice and body language of the Iron Lady extremely accurately.

Younger Margaret Thatcher was played by Eleni Josephides, in her debut performance with the group. She also did very well, with an especially good tone when Margaret had some more angry moments.

Older Queen Elizabeth (Kate Martin) came across as a very feisty Queen, far more relaxed than her young counterpart. I sometimes felt the lines were a little bit rushed but overall a lovely performance.

Younger Queen Elizabeth (Helen Power) maintained a great RP accent and also gave an excellent performance.

Thomas Cobb and Peter Coles as the two actors did a fantastic job, taking on so many roles and accents. I was especially impressed with Peter’s ‘Gerry Adams’, and Thomas’ bewigged ‘Nancy Reagan’. Their fourth-wall breaks to the audience were very good and really kept the pace going

All the costumes were good, with the four leads all with age appropriate suits and, of course, handbags. The set was nicely simple and worked well, with only movement of chairs and tables needed and props produced to hint at the changing environment, all done in a slick manner. I spotted only a couple of prompts which did not distract in anyway. Lighting and music worked really well. I especially enjoyed the use of appropriate songs at the change of scenes, for example 'Belfast Child' into the IRA bomb scene.

Given that the group began rehearsing this play well before the General Election was announced, it draws some frightening modern-day parallels, and shows that freedom and democracy are not any less in contention now.

This is quite a long play, but it did not feel like it dragged at all. It was funny, well performed and enjoyable. Congratulations to debut Director Lainy Cobb and to the whole cast and crew.