



Society : Loughton Amateur Dramatic Society
Production : Wife After Death
Date : 29th October 2016
Venue : Lopping Hall
Report by : Jacquie Stedman

Show Report

I was very pleased to attend your latest production, a cleverly written comedy by the man whom we all know as the 'father' of Rigsby in 'Rising Damp'. Although there is an underlying darkness to the story/situation the humour works really well through the various characters associated with the deceased – Dave Thursby. The dialogue is particularly well written with some crushing one-liners well-delivered.

Congratulations to Stephen Radley for the design and construction of what I can only describe as a 'comfortable' set – inviting one to live within it. It looked solid with very well decorated flats giving full height to the room. The french doors opened to the garden and were used without any hitches. One assumed that this entrance gave out to the garden which was 'full' of people awaiting the departure of the hearse. Having the curtains open as the audience entered the auditorium enabled them to get in the mood before the action started.....although at first sight I thought the coffin was the sideboard until I looked closer. The furniture was well positioned allowing the cast to move naturally around the room and position themselves suitably to deliver their dialogue. Harvey used the space particularly well, walking round the room with his hands in his pockets, and then gesticulating. As the seat of the sofa was a bit on the low side the ladies could have occasionally sat on the arm of either that or the chair, and please remember – never cross your legs when sitting down if the audience is on a lower level than the stage.....it could look less than decorous! The lighting, although very simple, was perfectly suitable for the production with little or no changes. The final blackout, as Harvey tripped spilling the ashes, was absolutely perfectly timed.

I was rather surprised that by Saturday, the lines were not more secure than they were and I fear this may have undermined the whole cast and slowed down the pace of the play overall. Insecure lines over a prolonged period, unfortunately, begins to embarrass the audience and stifle the laughter.....and there were a lot of opportunities for laughter in this piece.

Ian Howland (Harvey Barrett) was very assured and confident and commanded the first minutes of Act I when in conversation with his wife. It is here we learn about his relationship with Dave and how he guards this association jealously. His views about the other characters became very clear as the action progressed – he thought Laura was rather cold, he disliked Kevin because of his, perceived, relationship with Dave and was rather ambivalent about Kevin's wife Jane because it transpired she had an affair with Dave. Strangely enough nothing altered his admiration for Dave, although his frustrations showed some early signs of disillusionment. This was a well thought out performance with a believable depth to the character. So often comedies are written with superficial characters, but this was testament to Eric Chappell's writing, I think.

Wendy Butler (Vi Barrett) didn't always look comfortable in her role. She listened to Harvey and asked the right questions but delivered all her dialogue to the audience. Whilst this works well for most of the time try not to lose the intimacy of the conversation altogether, and endeavour to have a bit more light and shade within the actual delivery of the dialogue itself. I can imagine that Vi was the peacemaker within the relationship with Harvey and looked for the best in people....as she did with Laura. There was a lovely freeze when Laura spoke of Vi's affair with Dave.....she didn't move a muscle....well done!

Laura Thursby (Kimberley Packman) was the glamorous widow. I did find her dialogue rather hard to follow as she appeared to be using a very strange, stage, voice, making her dialogue rather stilted. I understand that Kimberley is Canadian and I think she would have sounded much clearer had she used her own accent – after all nowhere in the play does it say where or when she met Dave. There was a brittleness about her which became understandable as the revelations about Dave's extra-marital affairs came to light and with which she had been coping for some time.

Val Jones was Kay – the erstwhile Mrs Thursby, whose existence came as a complete shock to everyone, particularly Harvey, and with whom Dave had also been continuing a relationship. Her presence obviously caused some consternation to the other characters, particularly Harvey and Kevin who thought they both knew Dave so well.

Kevin Prewitt, in the hands of Adam Rabinowitz, clearly had a completely different view of Dave and was rather cutting towards Harvey – not a lot of love lost between those two! Although shattered by the revelation of his wife's affair with Dave, his lack of confidence doesn't allow himself to leave Jane or throw her out, just to throw his drink over Dave's corpse in frustration. I loved the thing about a 'flamboyant' tie which, in actuality was just a different shade...and not flamboyant in the least!

Charlotte Pope's Jane had no shame about her relationship with Dave and was portrayed as a rather hard young woman. I think it's important in any play that the audience feels some empathy with the characters, even if they are all rather selfish, but, unfortunately, Jane's voice was rather strident – again a bit of light and shade would have helped in the delivery. Her aim when throwing Dave's ashes was very accurate.

This had all the makings of a really good production, but unfortunately the combination of an inexperienced director and, mainly, inexperienced players meant that it never quite got there, and maybe this is one of those occasions when a longer rehearsal period and/or a director mentor would have been advantageous.

I wish you success with the rest of you season.

Jacquie Stedman
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