



Society : Loughton Amateur Drama Society  
Production : A Man for All Seasons  
Date : 30/3/12  
Venue : Lopping Hall  
Report by : Jackie Mitchell

## Report

A dramatic look at the events surrounding the formation of the Church of England, *A Man for All Seasons* tells the story of one man's decision to be true to his belief no matter what the cost might be. Featuring a very large cast, and some rather stylised dialogue, particularly from Thomas More himself, this was a challenging play to perform, but as usual, LADS were more than equal to the task, with numerous excellent performances, and some clever staging that allowed the frequent scene changes to be handled quickly and effectively.

The set itself was rather basic, and relied mainly on small changes in set dressing to convey the different scenes. The white back curtain allowed coloured lighting to be used to great effect, successfully creating different atmospheres for the various scenes. I particularly enjoyed the common man pub sign and the jurymen heads on sticks! The wooden panels on the side of the stage were a nice touch, although the intricate detailing of them perhaps seemed to have a slight Asian influence, which did not seem quite appropriate. The presence of the raised platform at the rear of the stage however, was very effective, adding real depth to the performance space. The use of several quick change table cloths, together with the repositioning of a chair was an effective and efficient way to create a new intimate environment, and the use of lighting was incredibly effective in finishing the job off – the subtle changes in light levels in the second scene, with the lighting changing in response to the number of lit candles, together with the yellow/orange tinge to the light was particularly impressive, really helping to convey the feeling of a candle lit environment. The stark red light on the back curtain, with the executioner and Thomas More mainly in black was also a great visual effect, that ended (almost) the play most effectively. The frequent sound effects, and the various pieces of music played throughout the play were well managed – the choice of music again helped to create the appropriate mood and feel for the various scenes of the show, while the timing of the various sound effects, in particular the rather quiet chiming of the clock in act 1, was spot on, becoming noticeable at just the right time to influence the action in the play. Props too were generally good, such as the jury men already mentioned, although the folder held by Thomas Cromwell did look a little too plastic when it shone under the stage lights, given that there would not have been anything resembling plastic around in Tudor times.

Costuming was generally very good, with all the outfits seeming in period, and also suitable to station of the various characters being portrayed, it was also good to see a number of costume changes, which both helped to indicate the passing of time, and in the case of many of the characters, also the change in their wealth and station. The all black of the common man, with the various bits of outfit to signal who he was at any given moment was a nice touch, that worked very well, and also added a bit of humour to the play. Thomas Mores' stockings were a little 'Nora Batty' at times, which was not ideal, and the large feather in King Henry's hat had a tendency to obscure his face when he was turned with that side of his head towards the audience, but aside from these minor issues, the costumes were very effective, and helped to create an authentic feel to the piece. If I had one criticism, it would be that Margaret More's hair was loose and visible under her hat, which seemed far too modern, and out of place compared with the rest of the cast – even just sweeping it up and off her face would have seemed more appropriate, especially in the second act, when she was a married woman – it is not a big thing, but it did stick out rather significantly throughout the play.

Jean Cooper, as director, did an excellent job of recreating the feeling of the Tudor era in the relatively small theatre of Lopping Hall, ensuring almost all our senses were immersed in the action of the play – indeed, the addition of a few pleasant (and not so pleasant) odours, was all that would have been required for the audience to readily have believed they had been transported to a small pocket of that time on the stage. In particular some of the smaller actions of the cast were significant in creating this feeling – the family prayer for example, seemed very natural, although not something that one imagines happens in many households today. She made good use of the space available, managing to create numerous believable scenes in the relatively small playing area, although the positioning of the cast around the table, which occurred quite a lot throughout the play, often led to the person sitting downstage left with their face away from the audience, which was not ideal. However, the various interactions of the characters were all plausible, and it was easy to imagine them continuing on their journey through London once they exited the stage.

With a relatively large cast, one or two weaker links might be expected, but in the case, they were generally very strong, and all worked well together to produce convincing characters, some of the roles were very small indeed, such as the Woman (Camilla Steel), and Chapuys' attendant (Richard Foster), but even these were confident performances. As the hero of the play, Thomas More, played by Andrew Rogers, gave a noble and proud performance. It was easy to feel sympathy for this man as he held to his belief regardless of the opinions of others, and even to his death. While one might not fully understand his stance, especially given the hindsight of today, one could still respect the integrity of a man who was determined to remain true to his conscience, no matter what it cost him, and Andrews' performance was confident and strong, and completely convincing throughout the play. The unwavering faith of a man in his own moral compass was clear to see, and all his words and emotions seemed very real – this was a pivotal performance in the play, which was superbly handled.

As the effective narrator, as well as all the small, common man roles, Iain Howland gave another excellent performance. This role was crucial not only in moving the plot along, and explaining various events, but also in bringing some humour to what could otherwise have been a rather heavy play. The numerous characters played by Iain throughout the evening were all different, while still retaining the humorous edge of the character we were introduced to in the opening scene, and this was a performer who was confident not only while interacting with others of the cast, but also in stepping beyond the fourth wall, and addressing the audience directly.

Dan Cooper, as Richard Rich looked excellent in the role. His dialogue delivery was confident and plausible, and although his laughter in his opening scene did seem a little forced, this was generally another strong performance.

Norfolk, played by Jon Gilbert sounded a little common on occasion for a lord, he was certainly less well spoken than Thomas More, and had a tendency to seem a little modern somehow. Emotionally also, while he committed fully, he did sometimes seem a little too loud and angry as the play progressed, however, aside from this, he gave a confident and characterful performance.

As Thomas More's wife, Alice, Karen Rogers gave another strong performance. Her facial expressions throughout the play were excellent, and her dialogue was confident and secure. She came across as a strong woman, if a little stiff on occasion and she did look a little uncomfortable at one time, when she put her hands on her hips, a move that for some reason seemed rather unnatural to her. However, her grief and anger as the play developed were very believable, and this was a great performance that complemented the others on stage.

Taylor Keegan, as the daughter, Margaret, gave another confident performance. She was a little quiet at times, and more vocal projection would have helped make her easier to hear, however, she came across well as a quietly intelligent character, which seemed to suit the role very well. Her Latin speech with the king in particular sounded very confident and secure, and rather impressive.

Wolsey, played by Roger Barker, was a small, but pivotal role, and he managed to create a slightly dark and well rounded character in the time he was on stage, with clear, well-delivered dialogue, and a confident performance – his costume too was excellent.

Howard Platt, as Thomas Cromwell gave a sterling performance. His accent was very convincing, containing just a hint of lower class 'London' overtones, and his characterisation was a perfect balance of friendly

and sneering – it was easy to see that here was a man who would try to twist any situation to suit his own ends. He gave us a real dark edge to the character that worked very well, especially in his interactions with the rest of the cast, and this was another powerful and convincing performance.

John Haylett had a difficult task as the Spanish ambassador Chapuys, as a convincing Spanish accent appears to be one of the hardest to consistently pull off. Certainly his accent did have a tendency to wander somewhat, however, this aside, he gave a confident performance, and despite the accent, his dialogue was clear and easy to understand, and the rather political machinations of his character seemed very plausible.

Will Roper, played by Tom Donoghue, gave a generally strong performance. His emotions were well placed, and although on occasion a slight Essex accent did appear to slip into his dialogue, he was usually well spoken, and this was another good character performance.

David Stelfox gave a very young, and somewhat selfish portrayal of King Henry, he came across rather like a spoilt child, which is a somewhat difficult image to have of a man who is king, however, considering his dialogue, this was a very interesting interpretation, and certainly seemed to suit the character given the later events of the play. His Latin delivery was rather less confident and secure than that of Margaret More, and sounded somewhat stilted, however, he committed fully to his performance, and both his dialogue and his facial expressions and physical movements worked together to give a convincing portrayal of what seemed to be a selfish spoilt child, whom no one has ever been able to say no to. I found this a thought provoking performance, and would have liked to have seen more of the character as the play progressed, although obviously this was not to be, instead, we can only surmise at his actions through the comments of others.

As the final player in the cast, Martin Howarth as Cranmer looked excellent in the role, both costume wise, and also in his physical and facial portrayal. His dialogue initially sounded very 'Church of England', being very moderate in tone and delivery, but as his scene developed, we saw more life and drama develop in his tone, and although he did at times seem a little hesitant with his dialogue, this was generally another well judged performance, that suited the role.

As I have come to expect from LADS, this was another excellent performance of a challenging play, and the attention to detail in the costuming and stage effects was generally very good, with a large cast of confident and strong performers, and I would like to thank them once again for inviting me along to see this show, and wish you all the best with your upcoming performance of *The Charlatan* in June.

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