



Society : Loughton Amateur Dramatic Society
Production : Anne Boleyn
Date : 30th October 2015
Venue : Lopping Hall
Report by : Jacquie Stedman

Show Report

I was delighted to be invited to report on your latest production – a re-telling, from another angle, of the story of Anne Boleyn and the King James Bible. This time, however, whilst witnessing her coquettishness and sexual allure as far as King Henry VIII was concerned, we saw a devout woman, keen to meet her ‘hero’ William Tyndale. We were also able to witness why she was the inspiration for James I in finding a way forward for the Church of England.

I always think that it is a challenge for any group to recreate such well documented figures and incidents but, once again, LADS did not disappoint. I found the Director’s notes incredibly useful in providing the setting and background for the play, and it was extremely clever of Howard Benton to call his play ‘Anne Boleyn’ rather than ‘The creation of the James I Bible’ or some other such name. He must have known of the interest and mystique surrounding this most famous of Henry’s wives. The writing was excellent with humour and intelligence, giving the audience a very varied theatrical experience.

The staging for this production was simple but so effective with the various acting levels on a thrust stage, but also using the floor of the hall, bringing the action to the audience and allowing the players to relate to them directly where appropriate. There was a richness about the setting despite the lack of much furniture or props, and this provided the perfect background to the action of the play. All the players used the levels to advantage and the smooth opening of the lustrous curtain USC provided a prominent exit/entrance for the cast.

There was very good pace throughout which kept the action moving, with secure dialogue and good characterisations. The excellent lighting plot worked particularly well and the music was very suitable to the era. All these things, when combined, worked to enrich the production and bring this particular part of our history alive for the audience. The play also cleverly plays with time where it moves between the court of King Henry VIII and the court of King James I after the death of Queen Elizabeth I, each Royal House captivating the feelings of the time with James apparently feeling some affinity and fascination with Anne.

The costumes were well judged throughout and quite sumptuous, further establishing the cast as royal personages and courtiers. Against this show of wealth were the followers of Tyndale, country men and women, appearing simply dressed with cloaks and rough clothing.

I thought your casting was excellent and having seen the play can understand why everyone was keen to be a part of it – there was lots of involvement at every level, and not one weak link in the ‘chain’ of performance. I think this is very much an ensemble piece with each player making a valuable contribution to the story. However I felt I couldn’t just make a blanket appraisal of the performance because everyone deserved recognition of their contribution to the overall enjoyment of the play. For me one of the most interesting things about the play was how the characters could almost have been divided up into ‘playing’ groups.

From her first entrance Anne Boleyn (Sophie Gilbert) held the audience. She was animated, her face full of expression and delivered all those characteristics which, centuries on, we all think we know. She was

coquettish with Henry, having an ability to keep him at arm's length sexually for over five years, and yet showing a devoutness which was surprising. With beautiful clear diction she ran the gamut of emotions up to the time of her death. It was very obvious that meeting her 'hero', William Tyndale, put her in danger but such was her devotion that she ignored the warnings. Her relationship with Henry (Howard Platt) was very believable. Although somewhat of a tease, she was witty and intelligent and he was quite captivated by her. This, of course, was the period when he was regal, young, handsome, a keen sportsman and very susceptible to a pretty face, before he descended into the disillusioned and disappointed monster he became. We saw a man totally under the spell of a clever woman who stopped at nothing to achieve his aim of marrying her, whatever the consequences. However, there was a very tender scene with Anne after her miscarriage, where he was so conciliatory – yet at the same time seeing the Lady Jane for the first time. Howard achieved all this very naturally, moving easily and giving Henry a very human, likeable persona.

Christian Mortimer gave a very good portrayal of King James I. He maintained his Scottish accent throughout with confidence and his timing and delivery were perfect. He did appear to be somewhat extreme at times and had no hesitation in playing with his sexuality because he was the King. He displayed all the traits of a spoilt child and possibly a spoilt childhood. His somewhat outrageous thoughts and ideas were handled with aplomb, and confidence, by Robert Cecil (Andrew Rogers) who was the stalwart, dependable support for James, trying hard to keep him in order. He was helped in his endeavours by Parrot played by Adam Rabinowitz, who also played Cromwell's man, Simpkin – with a change of costume. The King's relationship with the virile George Villiers (Tom Donoghue) progressed from friend to something more sexual, which Villiers appreciated was to his advantage despite having to debase himself. Tom portrayed Villiers as a rather shallow young man seeing his main chance under the protection of the king. Perhaps a little more attention was needed when playing drunk, not easy to do, but very convincing when done well.

Thomas Cromwell (Iain Howland) was the scheming, ambitious lord privy seal working with Cardinal Wolsey (Jon Gilbert) in the matter of the King's divorce from Catherine of Aragon. He was played with energy and good pace, clear diction and conviction in the role. One saw his more ruthless side in his conversations with Lady Rochford in the matter of her husband. During the scenes between Cromwell and Wolsey one could see the machinations of bringing the King's plan to fruition.

The ladies of the court, Lady Rochford (Roz Gerrie), Lady Celia (Steph Adleman) and Lady Jane (Charlotte Pope), all added to the story. They had the air of favourites of Anne, showing high spirits with her when required, but ever mindful of their tenuous positions. They each managed to adopt a different set of characteristics which made them come alive within the story.

Dean Lancelot Andrewes (Roger Barker), Doctor John Reynolds (Michael Lewkowicz) and Henry Barrow were the triumvirate intent on finding a new way forward for religion under James I. All very different personalities, well played with a hint of unrest if they got it wrong. Their scene with James was very well played with James putting forward so many variations on the theme of religion.

William Tyndale (Peter Fox) was obviously a man of the people – he always appeared with his followers who were country men and women – but was not fazed by meeting Anne, although he did appreciate that he could have been in a dangerous position if caught.

The supporting players - the country men and women, divines, courtiers and servants - combined to give 'dressing' to the action whenever they appeared and conducted themselves in a manner most befitting to their various stations in life.

My congratulations on continuing to bring good theatre to your audiences, giving both them and you the challenges that live performance brings. You never disappoint!

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