



Society : Loughton Amateur Dramatic Society
Production : Ghosts
Date : 18 June 2015
Venue : Lopping Hall
Report by : Sarah Buttler

Show Report

“Ghosts” is an enthralling piece of theatre about the effects that shadows of the past can have on the future. It is unsurprising that some of Ibsen’s play were deemed so controversial in his lifetime that they were banned. Whilst a modern audience is more sanguine about some of the themes in the play it is also true that others such as euthanasia and incest as subject matter are still considered somewhat taboo even today. The play remains a compelling piece about relationships within a small community without the same shock value of its day.

This was a thoughtful and considered piece of direction from ANDREW ROGERS who neither allowed the action to be cloying and sentimental nor melodramatic. There was a natural flow to the staging of the narrative underpinned by a stillness of movement which captured the emotional paralysis of the characters amongst the revelations of the plot. Stillness on stage can often have a powerful impact upon an audience and I thought it most effective. Characters stood or sat often in complete isolation from the other protagonists. Human contact was rare. Stillness told of internal struggle and emotional turmoil and there was little excessive movement. This technique worked incredibly well and I thought it most impressive.

The programme included some interesting side notes from the Director as well as the biography of Ibsen and these – as I found on my last visit - provided some thoughtful context to the production.

STEPHEN RADLEY and WENDY BUTLER/STEPH ADELMAN, set design/construction and properties, put together a set and properties which complemented this air of remoteness and isolation. The set was sparsely appointed with a small number of quality and functional period items of furniture and pictures. There were three working interior doors and a glass panelled exterior door to a conservatory/porch. There was a rather nice small wooden model of a house on one of the side tables. I wondered whether this was meant to be the house where the action was taking place, but unless I missed it, there was no allusion to this in the dialogue. The set was very well designed and solidly constructed – doors opened well, and were able to be closed firmly with no visible shaking of the walls.

Some of the exits and entrances had me a little confused. Pastor Manders entered the house through the conservatory but then left the house via one of – what I took to be – interior doors. The interior door in the back well, next to the exterior door, seemed to lead into a different part of the house yet was set close to the external wall. Weather is obviously a very important theme of the play and it is raining persistently at the outset of the play and through most of Act 1. When Pastor Manders arrives he complains about the rain. This is also referred to later when Oswald Alving cancels his walk

outside. Yet when Jacob Engstrand enters through the exterior door at the opening of the play there is no obvious reference to the weather implied through his clothing.

The stage was well lit by TERRY TEW and PETER HUBER, and although the lighting plot must have been relatively straightforward it was well delivered. There was a particularly effective lighting effect to denote the fire at the orphanage which was imaginatively done. Sound was similarly well imagined by ANDREW ROGERS and operated by PETER HUBER and there was some good use of incidental music.

Very nice costuming by LIZ ADAMS, HANNAH SOUTHGATE, SYLVIA ZILES NICK and CHRISTINE ECKLEY did a good job of reflecting the period. Mrs Alving's dress was a particular highlight. Make-up and hair was also in keeping with the period.

The play opens with dialogue between Jacob and Regina Engstrand, providing some important background to the characters and action. Both performers portrayed their characters very well but I didn't feel that the age gap between father and daughter was particularly well denoted and could have been enhanced by ageing Jacob, perhaps with longer greying hair and a beard. CHRISTIAN MORTIMER gave an intense, rather menacing air to the portrayal of the cynical, exploitative Jacob Engstrand. GEMMA GARSIDE's stillness and poise was most effective in portraying a young woman stuck by her sex and social standing without the means to marry into another social level. The simplicity of the character masks her grasping, mercenary nature and Gemma's last speech really demonstrated how this character grows through the play.

The play is hardly comic by design and although there is humour it is rarely laugh out loud. Neither is Pastor Manders a particularly funny character – his hypocrisy and lack of integrity are continuously called into question throughout the narrative. However, the humour that could be elicited from the character was very effectively exploited by ADAM RABINOWITZ. Adam made a physically imposing and pompous Pastor and gave his character a variety of wide ranging emotions: oily, easily offended, God fearing, indignant, proud and easily astounded as events unfurl. The breadth and the requirements of the role were more than matched by Adam's ability and I felt that this was a very impressive stage debut in such a demanding role.

CATHY NAYLOR gave an excellent performance as the troubled and haunted Mrs Alving who has passed on her own "ghosts" into the beliefs of Oswald and Regina. Cathy is clearly a very experienced actress and demonstrated excellent presence and stagecraft in this role. I found her portrayal of a tortured soul, called to account too late to change the course of events, extremely affecting especially in her re-telling of the truth of her husband's life to Pastor Manders. However, it was her anguish in the final scene where she is called upon to poison her terminally ill son where her experience and talent shone through. A most affecting, sincere and impressive performance.

DEAN BARTHOLOMEW gave a gentle performance of Oswald Alving befitting the doomed soul he is. Dean's slightly diffident demeanour, demonstrated Oswald's inability to settle even at his Mother's house. The final scene, when Oswald is dying and pleading to be put out of his misery was given a real sense of anguish and the interplay with Cathy Naylor as his Mother was incredibly touching. A very good performance.

I should like to thank the cast and crew for a very rewarding evening of theatre and the very professional Front of House team for a warm welcome. This is a difficult play to produce well and I am sure it presented those involved with not a few challenges. However, the acting was really first rate and the production values high. Congratulations to all involved. I do hope that your audiences improved – it certainly warranted a good crowd.

Best wishes

Sarah

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