



Society : Loughton Amateur Dramatic Society  
Production : Iron  
Date : 20/1/12  
Venue : Lopping Hall  
Report by : Jackie Mitchell

## Report

A demanding and unusual play, very character driven, Iron is set in a woman's prison, and focuses on the meetings between a young woman and her mother, who have not seen each other since the mother, Fay, killed her husband several years ago. With a cast of only four, the demands on the performers were high, but as usual, LADS rose to the challenge admirably, and this was a powerful and entertaining evening out.

With several small scenes, all set in various rooms in the prison, the set was designed to make the audience feel as if we were invisible witnesses behind the prison walls, an effect that was enhanced by having the guards patrolling through the audience in the visiting room scenes. The somewhat small performing spaces all at the front of the stage perfectly modelled the way we imagine prisons would feel, and the set looked solid and secure. The basic grey colour again perfectly reflecting the prison 'feel' required for the play. The lighting too was used to great effect throughout the play, both to create different environments for some of the stories told, and also to help create different moods when in the prison itself. The sound effects too were very evocative of the classic prison environment seen in film and TV, and added to the atmosphere of the play, again bringing the audience into the environment of the prison. Although there was not a great need for props in the show, there were some nice touches of set dressing that added to the realism of the environment, and this attention to detail worked very well.

Costuming in the play was simple; the uniforms for the guards were convincing, and Fays somewhat shabby clothing seemed appropriate for the convict. Josie's outfits in contrast were varied, although perhaps a little more of a gradual change from strait-laced to flirty throughout the play might have worked well, although I appreciate that time constraints may have prevented too many costume changes.

With a cast of only four, the play focused in general on their various interactions, with the pivotal character being that of the supposed killer, Fay. In this role, Jean Cooper gave a mesmerising performance. Her character's emotional swings were completely believable from the outset, and the subtleties of her apparent genuine distress, combined with her sly manipulation of those around her, which could have seemed conflicting, instead resolved into a genuinely convincing persona. Her gradual revelation of what had really happened the night she killed her husband was brilliantly handled, so that although a part of you was with the daughter, and wanted her to have a better reason, somehow, it was no real surprise to hear her explanation. This was a truly brilliant performance, and the play would not have worked without it.

As her estranged daughter, Josie, Birte Sponagel gave a good performance. She was on occasion a little stiff and although this was partly her initial character, she did not seem completely relaxed within her performance. Perhaps making some of her dialogue a little slower and more thoughtful would have seemed more natural, however, in general she worked very well with both Fay and the guards, and although her changing character was a little abrupt, it was still interesting to see how her exposure to her mother changed her, and Birte handled this pretty well. Her dialogue was all clear, and her characters motivation was easy to understand.

As the female Guard, Siobhan Schofield gave another powerful performance. She was imposing and seemed at first the classic nasty guard, picking on Fay for no obvious reason, but as the play went on, her motivations were gradually revealed, and it was increasingly easy to feel sympathy for her. Her scenes with Fay in particular were very strong, and the two women worked incredibly well together to produce some powerful and

convincing theatre. She, together with her male counterpart, played by Martin Howarth, had the difficult job of moving through, and remaining in the audience, in character, for prolonged periods of time, and although they were not the focus of attention at these times, this was still a challenging task that the pair performed admirably. As the other guard, Martin played a somewhat weaker character than Siobhan, who initially seemed more sympathetic to Fay, while also being more distant, and this perfectly balanced the more aggressive seeming female guard. Again, his characterisation was strong and consistent, and his scenes with the other guard, where some of her motivations were revealed, were very natural.

Directed by Iain Howland, this was an ambitious project that handled some difficult concepts in a generally very restricted environment. Despite this, the characters took on a life of their own, and the clever use of lighting, and the relatively small space to create different environments, such as Josie's night out worked exceptionally well. In plays such as this, the director's job is to encourage and build on inter-character relationships, and there can be no doubt that in this case, Iain, together with his cast, succeeded admirably, also managing to bring out a surprising number of light-hearted moments, in what could otherwise have been a rather harrowing play. These contrasting moods also added to the realistic feel of the play, resulting in an intriguing and thought provoking night out.

I would like to thank LADS for inviting me to come and see this play, it was an extremely entertaining evening out, as I have now come to expect from LADS, and I wish you all the best for your upcoming productions.

Jackie Mitchell  
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