



Society : Loughton Amateur Dramatic Society  
Production : Playboy of the Western World  
Date : 26/10/13  
Venue : Lopping Hall  
Report by : Jackie Mitchell

## Report

Playboy of the Western World is an interesting play, which according to the excellent and informative program notes, caused riots when it was first performed. However, as a modern day audience member, the language and other potentially inflammatory issues did not even raise an eyebrow. Given it's rather dark theme, I hesitate to describe it as a comedy, but there is no doubt that this cast manage to bring lots of humour to the fore, and this was, as I have come to expect from LADS, an excellent and entertaining evening out.

Set around the time it was written, in rural Ireland, the set was excellent. Although a deceptively simple box set, the level of detail raised it beyond the ordinary. From the seemingly textured walls, to the washing in front of the glowing fire, and the multiple items used to dress the set (including the plates that broke towards the end, I'm not sure whether that was intended, but it certainly added authenticity!), everything worked together to produce a completely plausible environment for the action to take place. On close inspection it seemed that wallpaper had been used to create the walls, and this was somewhat glittery, which could have been a problem, but it managed to seem as if the stone that had been used to construct the walls contained small crystals. The outside scene behind the small window and the main door was also excellent, and it is this kind of detail that distinguishes a great set from other good ones.

Lighting for the most part was simple and unobtrusive. The use of orange lighting to suggest the fire was effective, and other than that, there was little need for anything too sophisticated, but the cast were well and naturally lit throughout. The choice of music before each act was also good, and helped to set the scene in Ireland.

Costuming was equally good, with all the costumes perfectly suiting the various characters. Hair was also generally good, the hairpiece worn by Widow Quin in particular was excellent, and the cracked pate of Old Mahon was very realistic seeming. It was pleasing also to see that efforts had been made to suit footwear (or lack of) to the characters, this added a final touch to the look of the play, making it very easy to pick up the overall ethos and style of the piece.

Directed by Jean Cooper, this was a great interpretation of an interesting play. All the characters were plausible, and despite some potentially challenging dialogue, they all seemed to be completely comfortable with what they were saying, making it sound natural. Special mention should also be made of all the casts' efforts to affect an Irish accent. For the most part, they all did exceptionally well. A few of the slightly smaller roles occasionally slipped,

but for the most part, the accents were consistent, and helped to set and keep the play firmly in rural Ireland. They may not have held up to close inspection by an Irish person, but they were naturalistic enough to convince within the context of the play. It was also impressive that every performer moved beyond the accent, to deliver their dialogue in a sensible way. All too frequently, people focus on generating the accent to the detriment of the word sense, and it was gratifying that this was not the case on this occasion. Jean also made excellent use of the set and props, and was not afraid to leave the stage empty for short times when the story demanded it. The movement of Pegeen Mike in and out of the side room in her early dialogue with Christopher Mahon was an excellent example of a real understanding of how to bring reality into the theatrical environment. It would have been easy to make this dialogue static, but having her enter and exit while preparing his bed lent real authenticity to the scene.

The cast worked well together to generate the feeling of a small rural community where everyone knew each other, and despite the acceptance of more than one murderer, somehow, their behaviour and reactions seemed perfectly reasonable.

As the protagonist, Christopher Mahon, Dean Bartholemew gave a strong performance, managing to balance his character on a knife edge of nervous energy and anger, depending on the situation. Despite its apparent speed, his attraction to Pegeen was believable, and even his relatively sudden descent into rage at the end was handled well, with early flashes of this behaviour ensuring that it was not too unexpected – even the final reconciliation with his father did not jar, partly due to the strong script, but also due to Deans ability to bring that script very naturally to life.

In the role of his father, Paul Caira was equally strong as Old Mahon. Generally coming across as a thoroughly unpleasant old man, with no respect for his son, it was easy to see why Christopher might have snapped and hit him with the loy. As with Christophe however, his change at the end, favouring his son rather than the rest of the locals was somehow consistent with his character, despite its suddenness.

Howard Platt gave a great comic performance as Michael James Flaherty. Although not a huge role, he made a big impression when he was on stage, perfectly capturing the somewhat stereotypical drinking Irish father, and his responses in the first scene were in many ways responsible for setting the scene for the light-hearted take on what could otherwise have been a rather dark production.

As his daughter, and the potential love interest of Christopher, Frances Dodd gave a strong and confident performance as the strong-willed and feisty Margaret Flaherty, also known as Pegeen Mike, while still managing to give us flashes of her underlying vulnerability. She had some great facial expressions, and was able to induce a laugh on occasion with just a look.

Cathy Naylor was an excellent counterpart to Pegeen, bringing a more worldly confidence to the husband slaying Widow Quin. She worked well with the rest of the cast, and it was easy to see her as the somewhat manipulative, yet not bad-hearted widow. She too had a catalogue facial expressions, which she used to good effect, again generating a number of laughs without having to say a word.

Shawn Keogh was a rather cowardly lad played to good effect by Tom Donoghue. His rapidly vanishing air of bravado whenever confronted with any kind of threat was well-judged, and he worked well with the rest of the cast to make his character and the play itself believable.

Roger Barker and Martin Howarth did reasonable jobs as Philly Cullen and Jimmy Farrell. There were a couple of moments when Roger seemed to struggle with his lines, and both actors had a tendency to drop their accents occasionally, but overall, their characterisations as older, usually drunk farmers, were good, and their two characters also balanced each other well, with Roger in particular showing clearly that despite his outward appearance, his character was not perhaps as foolish as one might first assume.

As the three giggling village girls, Lindsay Swinson, Jodie Seymour and Sophie Robertson worked very well together, giving three different, yet well-matched characters. Sophie, as Honour Blake was clearly the most silly and giggly girl, and she brought real energy to the role. Sarah Tansy appeared to be the ring leader and most vocal of the three, and Lindsay fell easily into the role, taking charge in their conversations with Christopher. Jodie finished off the threesome as Susan Brady, a somewhat quieter, but still high energy performance.

In the two very small roles as Villagers, Foster Barnett and Wendy Butler provided good support in the 'crowd' scenes, and despite their short time on stage, they still brought energy to their roles.

This was a surprisingly entertaining play, which was easy to access despite the somewhat unusual language, which was due in no small part to the excellent direction and performance from the cast, aided by great support from the production team. I would like to thank LADS for the opportunity to see the show, and wish you all the best with the rest of your season.

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