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## COLD COMFORT FARM



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WHAT a pity Faringdon Community Theatre can't go on tour... The quality of their latest production, *Cold Comfort Farm*, was just too good to be dismissed in four performances.

They probably set themselves their most ambitious task yet, with this clever adaptation by Paul Doust of the classic Stella Gibbons novel. But it was a triumph — for the producer, Beryl Rees, for the cast of thousands (well, 35 actually), for the set designers and the costume makers, and for the sound and lighting wizards. Technical Director Tim Reeves can be very proud indeed of the way this most complex production was brought to market.

He can be very proud of something else, too. His mother. For this was a welcome and triumphant return for a veteran of Faringdon theatre from way back,

Nancy Reeves. Her partnership with Helen Barter, who herself was brilliant in the lead part, was a constant delight. Nancy's interpretation of the character of the mad grandmother Ada Doom was inspired; while Helen as Flora Poste, who sets herself the task of re-organising the lives of her eccentric rural relatives, held the whole edifice together with near-professional aplomb.

But this was a show where everybody played their part, without exception: from Dave Headey's rustic innocence of Adam Lambsbreath to Mike Durham's strident but guileless Reuben Starkadder; from Carolyn Taylor's weird Judith Starkadder, to Pauline Durham's suicidal Rennet and Debbie Lock's enigmatic social climber Elfine Starkadder. But everyone deserves their mention: Nick Hobden doubling as Charles, Flora's leading man, and the ladykilling star-struck Seth

Starkadder, Walthers Schoonenberg as film mogul Mr Neck, Alan Taylor as the rather undesirable Urk as well as the polished gentleman Richard Hawk-Monitor, Carole Tappenden as Mrs Hawk-Monitor, Roger Leitch, as the ranting Amos Starkadder (also doubling as the butler, Sneller), and Steven Lewis, with a walk-on part as photographer.

And the chorus... how about that chorus? They were wonderful, and the rustic accents enchanting: well done Jill Headey, Kate Lord, Kate Peer, Irene Schoonenberg, Jeni Summerfield (and Joan Lee, whom I saw at dress rehearsal, but who unfortunately had to pull out of the performance at the last minute). Well done, too, the Starkadder children, played by Louise Benton, Louise Butler, Claire Green, Philip Hurst, Julian Probert and Paul Summerfield. And the couples from the Impetus School of Dancing, Swindon, who came along to be guests at the Ball and the Wedding.

This was certainly one of the more entertaining evenings I have spent in the amateur theatre. And I take my hat off to those who worked so hard to make so much of such a difficult challenge. It really is a shame that it all has to be packed away after only three days.

● The cast of *Cold Comfort Farm* were delighted, if very surprised, to find that the playwright himself, Paul Doust, was in the Saturday night audience. He had bought his own ticket, and nobody knew of his presence until he turned up in the dressing room afterwards.

He said he was "very impressed", and was surprised at how well the group had staged his play on such a small budget. He delighted them by saying it was one of the best productions of his play that he had seen.