

# Confusions

Four one-act plays by Alan Ayckbourn  
Performed in May 1999 at Faringdon School

## Ayckbourn's 'Confusions' are a real test for directors

WITH Ayckbourn-style drama, there is no doubt that the direction is quite as crucial as the acting if the audience is to get the most out of what are, in reality, merely exaggerated slices of life. Multiply Ayckbourn by four, and one can appreciate the achievement of Faringdon Dramatic Society in getting an audience rocking in their seats for at least two of the four-play collection, 'Confusions'.

Add to the challenge the fact that the Society had to switch venues at the last minute, from the Community Theatre to Faringdon School (thanks to the school authorities for coming to the rescue) and this was another production to be proud of.

I saw excerpts from the second play, 'Between Mouthfuls' during dress rehearsal. So I know how much went into streamlining the rather unpromising setting for what basically consists of two conversations taking place at separate tables in a restaurant. What makes the dialogue mesh, is that one half of each couple is having a secret affair with the other. And what tests the skills of the director (in this case, Dave Headey) is that each conversation is highlighted only when the table is approached by the waiter (played with Wodehouseian aplomb by a young man with all the right credentials, Josh Smith). Carolyn

There is an underlying pathos to this plot, too, as in all good comedy - well brought out by Debbie Lock, as the mother who has lost her grasp of adult relationships. Karen Whiffen and Tim Gerry came across very naturally as the bemused but on-the-whole 'obedient' neighbours. The director was Simon Wisbey.

Onto the third play, 'Gosforth's Fete', which is pretty much basic situation comedy (a rather chaotic village event beset by more personal relationship problems, but this time acted out unwittingly over a public address system) giving plenty of opportunity for pure slapstick. The timing, as it had to be, was excellent. Simon Wisbey's role in the Scout leader-cum-cuckolded boyfriend was a classic comic performance, and Alistair Warner and Joan Lee were both very believable as fete organiser and tea-lady whose teamwork got a little closer than intended. Carolyn Taylor carried through her persona from the first play, this time as a VIP fete-opener, whose lofty civic pomposity is sure to be pricked by the combination of English weather and a set of (unseen) rowdy wolf cubs, while Debra Keasal was delightful in her portrayal of the classic rural vicar. All credit to the director, Carole Tappenden.

The final play, 'A Talk in the Park' is, by contrast, rather enigmatic in its concept, and also rather too

Taylor played the aggrieved wife to Roger Leitch's philanderer, while Gary Bates was the workaholic husband who took his eye off the holiday activities of his wife, Lois Wells.

Not the funniest of scripts, but it served as a nice wind-down after some of the hilarity engendered by the intriguing premise of the first play, 'Mother Figure', which has a stay-at-home mum treating her adult neighbours in the only way she knows how - as children.

predictable in its unfolding. It revolves simply around five figures sitting on benches in a park, who take turns in boring each other to distraction in a kind of Talking Heads meets Musical Chairs. Director of this one was Joan Lee.

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