

The Farndale Avenue Housing Estate Townswomen's Guild Dramatic Society Murder Mystery

A comedy by David McGillivray & Walter Zerlin Jnr.
Performed in May 1992

Touch of class from the comediennes

Didn't they do well? The five female stars, that is, of the Faringdon Community Theatre's latest production, with the elephantine title of The Farndale Avenue Housing Estate Townswomen's Guild Dramatic Society Murder Mystery. With special congratulations to the director, Jo Webster.

This was a brave comedy for the players to attempt: firstly, because the plot all revolves around the awfulness of an amateur theatre production, in which the cock-ups have to be clearly seen as part of the script, and secondly because timing of entrances as well as funny lines have to be spot-on if the spoof is not to lose its meaning and its comedy.

The five actresses have to take a total of 14 parts between them. But although the audience's applause and laughter is naturally directed at their stage antics, equal credit is due to all those behind the scenes and working the lights and the sound, who also have to be spot-on in their timing, and maniacal in their assistance with costume and prop-changes.

It all adds up to a tremendous challenge. And even if you sometimes feel the original joke is perhaps rather stretched by the writers, David McGillivray and Walter Zerlin Jnr, the way this comedy was tackled by Carole Tappenden, Helen Barter, Brenda Keith-Walker, Jeni Summerfield and Debbie Lock, draws nothing but admiration. They were very well-rehearsed, very slick in their handling of the complex sequences of boobs and botch-ups, and very funny.

Particularly memorable were Jeni Summerfield's inter-round presidential speeches to the supposedly assembled Town's women, Helen Barter's manic portrayal of the confused Pawn the Butler, Debbie Lock and Brenda Keith-Walker's double-act with a wheelchair, and Carole Tappenden's parody of the Agatha Christie-style Inspector O'Reilly.

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