

The Woman in White

A play by Constance Cox
adapted from the mystery novel by Wilkie Cox
Performed in November 1994

Smooth treatment makes classic suspense story an inspired choice

FARINGDON Community Theatre continue to display astonishing versatility, by taking yet another change of direction - this time towards one of the classic suspense stories, Wilkie Collins' *The Woman in White*.

With Ayckbourn comedy, courtroom drama, classic musical and the eccentric humour of *Cold Comfort Farm* all under its belt, this group yet again showed that it can more than hold its own among the best in provincial amateur theatre.

And most exciting of all, it was achieved with new talent as well as old. It seems there is plenty more where the rest came from. This performance was dedicated to the late George Young, a stalwart of Faringdon theatre from way, way back. He would have been proud...

Thanks to very tight direction from Peter Webster, taking a rest from his own stage parts, *The Woman in White* never flagged, despite the one-set format. As for the actors, this was one occasion when not even a reviewer anxious to find something to pick on, could really identify a weak link.

But it is difficult not to say a word

Alistair Warner carried off his part as the villain of the piece, Sir Percival Glyde, smoothly and entertainingly, without having to resort to melodramatic gestures.

Nick Hobden grabbed the opportunity of a delightful cameo as the eccentric hypochondriac Frederick Fairlie, and Tim Reeves was as secure as ever, this time as the family solicitor of somewhat independent mind. Debbie Lock doubled up prettily as Laura Fairlie and her double, the ghostly Anne Catherick - the 'Woman in White' herself, while Carolyn Taylor made a late entry for the denouement as Anne's mother. Ieuan Thomas oiled his way through the part of the scheming Count Fosco, with Melanie Nicholls as his Countess. The cast was completed by Carole Tappenden, providing a pleasing continuity as the willing but hard-done-by house-keeper Mrs Vesey, and Walther Schoonenberg as Frederick Fairlie's helpmate.

The period set and costumes were again magnificent - full marks to Jo Webster and her team, Peter Webster, Irene and Walther Schoonenberg and Carole Tappenden (set) and to Joan Lee, Jeni Summerfield and Kate Peer

about newcomer Duncan Graham, who displayed a confident stage presence worthy of an experienced hand, or about Kate Lord, promoted from the 'chorus line' to develop a strong and convincing characterisation in the lead part of Marion Halcombe, which never flagged.

(costumes).

I.S.

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