

FARINGDON DRAMATIC SOCIETY

Present

‘OUR TOWN’ by Thornton Wilder, November 2009

The front of house team, as usual, welcomed everyone with a smile and then after the ‘no mobile phones or photos please’ speech we were told to ‘enjoy ourselves’ which we did.

Thornton Wilder won a Pulitzer Prize for this play in 1938, it is set in small-town America from 1901-1913, seen mainly through the daily routine of the lives of two families, the Gibbs and the Webbs.

The narrator (Debbie Lock) skilfully controls the play weaving in and out of each scene, talking straight to the audience. A big part played very convincingly and although prompts Amanda Linstead and Sarah Cousins are named in the programme they were not needed by anyone during the production.

The play was presented as Thornton Wilder intended with very minimal scenery or props – relying instead on good mime from the players and lighting and sound effects. I loved the clinking of bottles when the milkman appeared and the clucking when Mrs Gibbs was feeding her hens.

I particularly liked Joe Crowell (and his brother Si) played by a young actor (Seb Allum) with a believable American accent, clear diction and a cheeky, confident swagger.

I felt some genuine affection between the two married couples Dr Gibbs (Daniel Lander) and Mrs Gibbs (Karen Whiffen) and Mr Webb (Adrian Wells) and Mrs Webb (Janie Eyre-Brook) although I could not believe that Mrs Webb was 10 or 20 years older than Mrs Gibbs.

(Tom Woolman) was confident and happy as the Gibbs’ son George, with a good American accent. His school-friend and eventual bride, one of the Webbs’ daughters, Emily, was played by (Harriet Warner). I felt her speech was rather hurried and she needed a lighter touch to play a young girl – I would have loved to have seen some white flowers in her hair as a young bride – we were told there were flowers in the garden.

Act 1 shows us school and home life in a peaceful little town, I liked Louella, the town gossip but as with the milkman I can’t identify her from the programme and I was a bit confused by the Constable’s suit – he looked more like a bank manager but perhaps that’s what they wore?

Act 2 sees the wedding of George and Emily with lovely wedding outfits for the guests and very effective church lighting. I would have liked some music during the scene change from house to wedding and felt confused that the vicar in Act 1 didn’t conduct the wedding.

Act 3 is 9 years later – nice lighting of tree in the cemetery – we soon realise that all the people sitting so still are dead, not so easy to sit perfectly still on stage but this experienced bunch of actors did. Nice, believable undertaker, again I can’t identify him from the programme. Good idea to have the funeral party walk down the hall in step.

Costumes (Jeni Summerfield and Joan Lee) felt true to the period although I did not think a plunge bra under Emily’s wedding dress was appropriate, a chemise perhaps? Lighting and Sound (Gary Bates and Ian Chandler) were excellent.

I think the message from Thornton Wilder that I took from this play was that we take no time to look at one another – we should enjoy every minute.

Lots of thoughtful pieces from Director Peter Webster.
Congratulations on bringing this play to a receptive and interested audience.

Deidre Jones