

FARINGDON DRAMATIC SOCIETY

'Heroes' translated and adapted by Tom Stoppard from 'Le Vent de Peupliers' by Gerald Sibleyras

Our three heroes are veterans of the First World War spending their last years in a retirement home for ex-servicemen. The Home is run by Sister Madeleine who steadfastly, we are told, thwarts their efforts to 'escape', if not to Indo-China, at least to feel the wind in the far off Poplars that gave the original French play its title.

The evening started with a delicious French meal with French songs beautifully played on the piano by Debra Warner. Perhaps the attentive ladies who served us should have been dressed as French maids? After all I recognised all of them as being very accomplished actresses from FDS.

Our three old soldiers regularly meet on one of the smaller terraces of the Nursing Home.

The laughs started within minutes when Gustave, (played with wonderful military bearing by John Taylor), the old curmudgeon of the three, complains of their life there as 'tepid soup and then to bed'. He hates everything, especially Sister Madeleine 'there is a distant coolness between us' Henri (Dave Headey) limps from a leg wound but still takes his constitutional round the cemetery and admires the teacher in the village. Dave Headey showed his experience with wonderful comic timing, judging just how long to wait for the wave of laughter before carrying on.

Philippe (Daniel Lander) has shrapnel in his head and keeps passing out. The passing out and coming round scenes were totally believable. Philippe is the fence-sitter of the three; he had nicely 'greyed' hair – make-up (Mary Mountford-Lister).

I really enjoyed watching the story unfold as told by three talented actors directed by Sarah Varnom. Although set in France Sarah resisted French accents (the Allo Allo effect) and these actors convinced us that they were indeed French. Dave Headey affected a true Lancastrian accent and why not? The French accent varies throughout the country the same as the English.

I really felt they were old soldiers, upright bearing, smart suits, (wardrobe Jeni Summerfield and Joan Lee) and polished shoes.

I loved the music Sarah chose for the scene changes, La Mer, The Marseillaise, Edith Piaf and Autumn Leaves before the final scene in September. Sound (Gary Bates) – small point, I would have liked some music over the bows but there was plenty of well deserved applause.

I also appreciated the gentle dimming of the house lights before each act. Lighting design was by Ian Chandler.

The terrace had two good walls with a plant in a pot on one side (why not also on the other?) a realistic tree and a very large, heavy, ornamental dog that Gustave wanted to take with them on their trek to visit the Poplars. Set designed by Jo Webster and constructed by her seven man team.

Debbie Lock was in charge of a large production team and Sandra Keen's Front of House team gave us the warm welcome we all expect when we attend a FDS production.

I loved watching these three experienced actors with their unhurried speech and clear diction throughout – a master-class for young actors, I hope some were watching and took note. Thank you

Deidre Jones