



Be inspired by amateur theatre

Society : Faringdon Dramatic Society  
Production : Living Together - Alan Ayckbourn  
Date : November 7<sup>th</sup> 2015  
Venue : Faringdon Junior School  
Report by : Rob Bertwistle NODA Rep. District 12

---

## Show Report

It was with great pleasure that I accepted the kind invitation from Katie Dyet (producer and co-director) to attend the final night's performance of your latest production – Alan Ayckbourn's 'Living Together'. This is one of Ayckbourn's more popular and well known pieces being part of a trilogy known as the 'Norman Conquests'.

Due to extensive building works being presently carried out I first encountered Katie – torch in hand – guiding audience members through the damp and gloomy November evening towards an unfamiliar entrance at the venue.

However, in no time at all we were in the cheery surroundings of Faringdon Junior School hall and the setting for tonight's performance. It was nice to see some familiar faces and to receive such a warm welcome. Thank you to all the Front of House members.

My reserved seat was fairly close to the stage from which I had an almost uninterrupted view of the action. Unfortunately there was a lady with rather 'large hair' sitting in front of me so my view was somewhat restricted unless I moved my head to look round her and I was conscious of the people behind me finding that quite irritating. Might I suggest 'off setting' the seats – theatre style – rather than placing them directly behind the ones in front. This may help audience members have a clearer view of the stage. I tend to sit quite tall in a chair and I am always conscious of restricting others' views in an auditorium which is not raked.

### The Production

This was a first class production with an impressive set and high production values. The look and feel of the piece – particularly the time setting – the early nineties – (although the play was originally written and set in the seventies) was well realised. The actors used the playing area to good effect and Director, Dave Headey, achieved some fine performances from his talented cast. There were, however, times when the pace flagged a little and, as it is always my contention, actors **must** project - at times some of the dialogue was lost.

### The Cast

Sarah - the organising and controlling wife - was perfectly captured by Sarah Couzens. Good use was made of the playing area and clear diction was in evidence. Your characters' frustration at other's shortcomings was well conveyed. Good facial expressions made this a very believable characterisation.

Reg – her jovial, but compliant husband - was played well by Gary Field. The character was well defined and I liked his determination to play one of his absurdly complex, self-devised board games which was very amusing. This was a well-judged performance and his ‘one-liners’ were delivered perfectly.

Norman - the raffish, lady-killing assistant librarian was played with relish by Adrian Wells. I enjoyed the scene where he became intoxicated on ‘mothers’ home-made wine. Very amusing! Be careful with diction and volume as occasionally I had to strain to hear the dialogue. Nevertheless this was a strong and well-rounded performance.

Sandra Keen was good as Annie, the caring and care-worn daughter of the unseen, bed-ridden and demanding mother. Her anger, resignation and frustration at her ‘lot’ were well realised. The frustration that her secret assignation with Norman had been thwarted was conveyed beautifully. Here again the odd word was lost due to a drop in volume, however, this was a strong portrayal of a woman not quite sure in which direction her life was heading and a little afraid of what lay ahead.

I liked Jeff Barry as Annie’s supposed boyfriend Tom, the local vet, who bumbled amiably in and out of the action and who Annie mercilessly lampoons as he is unable to make any decisions and when asked the simplest of questions prefaces it with a protracted ‘Hummmmm...’ This was a well observed characterisation and crystal clear dialogue and good use of the stage made this an excellent performance.

Norman’s long-suffering and slightly aggressive wife Ruth, who we do not meet until act two, was played well by Helen Thrower. Here was a woman clearly in despair at the carryings on of her ‘randy’ husband but who still loves him (and I think him, her). The pathos in their relationship in the final scene was played out well. Again, here was good diction and use of the stage.

### The Set

The one set play depicted the living room of an old country house which had perhaps seen better days. The decaying former opulence was captured beautifully in the style, design and dressing of the set. One slight puzzlement I noticed was a door down-stage right which was never used and which was mostly blocked by an armchair. Could this have been used as another exit possibly? Maybe to the front door – enabling the cast to not have to keep entering/exiting using the French doors into the garden. I liked the working wall lights which worked in perfect synchronisation when the character on stage operated the switch to turn them on. The set was pretty sturdily constructed I think, though once or twice when Norman was ‘sleeping’ on the window seat and changing position quite heavily the pictures on the adjacent walls shook rather alarmingly. Maybe securing their bottom edges as well would prevent this happening. A small point I know, but small details like that can often destroy the illusion, be quite distracting and sometimes, unintentionally funny! However, many congratulations must go to Jo Webster and her team for the marvellous design and realisation of the set. I do hope you managed to take some photographs of it.

### Lighting, Sound, Props, Costumes

The lighting and sound design worked well and while it was not a complicated lighting plot the overall effect gave the piece atmosphere, mood and depth. Congratulations to Ian Chandler and Gary Bates.

Props - assembled by Ceri Baker, Gill Coffin and Jo Webster were all seemingly in keeping with the style and time of the play and were all used to great effect by the cast. I wonder - did you design a board game especially? It looked very effective from the audience perspective.

The costumes looked fine and were presumably supplied by cast members – with advice from Jeni Summerfield – as there is no specific reference to a wardrobe/costume supplier in the programme.

### The Programme

The programme design by Dave Headey (a busy man indeed!) was simple yet effective with some cast photographs as well as interesting and informative biographies coupled with some background information about the play. I liked the rehearsal photographs also – always a nice touch.

This humour and subject matter of this play may seem a little dated by today's (dubious) standards of what passes for comedy and taste but the evening was certainly enjoyed by the pleasingly large audience.

My thanks to everyone involved with the production for a most enjoyable evening's entertainment. May I wish Faringdon Dramatic Society every success with its next production 'Happily Ever After..?'

With very best wishes to you all,

Rob

Rob Bertwistle

NODA Regional Representative

District 12

NODA London

*Keep in touch with London Latest - NODA London's e-newsletter.*

*Follow us on Twitter @NODA\_London*

The re-energised NODA London Twitter account! With all the latest on the amateur theatre scene in London!