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Society : Faringdon Dramatic Society
Production : My Friend Miss Flint
Date : 10th May 2017
Venue : Buscot House Theatre
Report by : Rob Bertwistle Regional Representative (District 12)

Show Report

Thank you for the kind invitation to review Faringdon Dramatic Society's latest production of the comedy *My Friend Miss Flint* – Donald Churchill and Peter Yeldham's cautionary tale of the ultimate tax fiddle and its hilarious and unexpected ramifications.

I'm sure we'd all like to ignore our tax returns but no one wants a close encounter of the fraught kind with Her Majesty's Inspector of Taxes and so no audience could fail to be sympathetic to the plight of Tom, the hapless hero of the piece, put at the mercy of the Tax man by his manipulative ex-wife and accountant Sarah.

The Production:

This is the second FDS production I have had the pleasure of attending in the delightful location of the Buscot Park Theatre set in beautiful grounds a few miles outside Faringdon. Unlike my last visit to this venue when the rain was, to say the least, persistent, on this occasion it was a perfect early summer evening with glorious sunshine and wonderful vistas on which to gaze.

This production was perfect for the small stage and very intimate feel of the theatre. The action could have had more pace but as I will mention later this was greatly limited by some of the actors on rather too many occasions being unsure of their lines.

The Set

On entering the auditorium one was immediately struck by the décor and intimacy of the tiny theatre with the postage stamp stage. There being no tabs the set was clearly visible. A modern 'bachelor pad' the morning following an obviously 'fun' party with plates of half eaten food and assorted bottles littering the stage. The minimalistic use of furniture and the clever use of a single side flat, stage right which had entrances to a 'bathroom' and a 'kitchen' with the 'bedroom' being accessed upstage left meant the players had just enough room to manoeuvre themselves around the tiny acting area. A drinks table on which was also placed the telephone was set rear centre stage. A modern smallish couch was placed centre stage with a rather futuristic-looking white chair being set downstage right. As Tom was a well-known gardening 'personality' the back wall stage left was decorated with a trellis interwoven with various plants and flowers. A small side table stage left was used for assorted 'bits and bobs' A clever design and one which utilised the space to great effect. The coffee table in front of the couch did seem intent on catching out some of the players as it got in the way on several occasions. However, the set design was not been accredited to one person in the programme so I must assume it was a collaborative effort so well done to all involved.

Lighting and Sound

Steve Greening's sound and lighting plots were perfectly suited to the action and appeared to work well enough and the timing of the telephone bell was spot on.

Props

Ceri Baker had assembled some authentic looking props which the cast handled well. There was just the small mishap with the bra on the night I attended...enough said! I was particularly impressed with the tax man's (Mr. Dodds) briefcase which he rummaged around in several times bringing out various official looking forms and also locating all manner of tax related paraphernalia and a well-used note book.

Costume, Hair, Make-up

Again there were no credits for these quite important areas of the production but each was done well and so as it was a modern day setting one must assume that everyone supplied their own costumes etc. which all worked fine.

The Programme

Dave Headey's programme was informative and contained the usual cast biographies and background to the production as well as some colourful rehearsal shots by Anna Marlow. I liked the front cover design with the 'cartoony' tax man brandishing tax returns surrounded by potted plants. Incidentally in the production team there is a listing for 'continuity'. I have noticed this is several programmes recently. I'm not sure what the job entails. I thought 'continuity' was only needed in the film making process.

The Directors

The play was co-directed by Gary Field and Richard Lock both of whom are more likely to be found on the other side of the footlights.

I believe it was Richard's first foray into the realm of directing and what better way to cut your directorial teeth than to make it a joint effort - and two heads are better than one so they say!

The challenge was use the very small acting area to good effect and of course to elicit believable and entertaining performances from the cast.

Both were achieved well given the wordy nature of the piece and the limited space. The entrances and exits were cleverly executed using the theatres existing structures - I liked the way characters entered Tom's apartment using the side door stage right and exited the auditorium via the centre stairs. There were some good characterisations and the players projected well although the theatre is so small it might be said it would be difficult *not* to be able to hear.

Might I suggest that books needed to be down a little sooner because, as I alluded to earlier, the lines on occasions were not terribly solid? I could tell that the cast were hesitant with their cues which drastically restricted the pace and rhythm of the delivery.

First night nerves aside there were one or two 'rabbit in the headlight' moments as some players struggled to deliver lines appearing not be fully certain if what they were saying was correct. But well done gentlemen the proceedings went off generally very well indeed and the appreciative audience certainly were kept very amused by the twists and turns in the plot.

The Cast

Jeff Barry gave a competent performance as Tom the gardening ‘celebrity’ suddenly finding himself at the mercy of his ex-wife accountant Sarah. Jeff used the stage well and obviously had fun. Great facial expressions - notably incredulity and horror - all made for a well-rounded performance.

Lucy, who had obviously enjoyed a passionate night with Tom (they had actually only met that night) and emerges from the bedroom wearing one of his shirts, was played waspishly by Suzanna Carter. She captured this character very well but was, I felt, curiously cold to the man she had spent the night with. Suzanna gave a strong performance and it was good to see her in a ‘straight’ acting role as I have previously seen her in musical related roles.

Albert, unusually, Tom’s ‘daily’ complete with ‘pinny’ was played with good comic timing by Martin Waymark. According to his programme biography this is Martin’s first venture into treading the boards. I thought he was a complete ‘natural’ with a very watchable stage presence and a laid back ease of delivery. I wonder if he will be tempted back for future productions. Well done!

Janie Eyre-Brook played the duplicitous Sarah to good effect. She used the stage well and really gave a believable portrayal of this rather aloof and self-serving ex-wife. She interacted convincingly with other players and looked very much the part in her well-chosen costume.

I liked Gary Bates as the probing and tenacious tax inspector Mr. Dodds. He played it beautifully dead-pan and just about the right amount of tongue in cheek humour without slipping completely into the stereo-typical version of the dreaded tax man. This was an amusing and well-judged performance.

To round off the small cast, Katie Dyet gave an assured performance as the chief investigator of would-be tax dodgers C P Lens. However, having to wait until almost the closing minutes of the play Katie made an impact as soon as she made her entrance. A good characterisation with believable interactions with other cast members.

Thank you once again for your first class hospitality and to *everyone* associated with this production and may I wish FDS every success with their next production.

Best wishes

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