

National Operatic & Dramatic Association

London Area Report



Society
Production
Date
Venue
Report by

FARINGDON DRAMATIC SOCIETY
The Importance of Being Earnest
28-30 June 2007
Faringdon Junior School
Gareth Jeremy. Region 12

My thanks to Karen Whiffen for the invitation to cover your last production - *The Importance of Being Earnest* by Oscar Wilde.

During the evening I had the opportunity to speak to the Director Jeff Barry, and some members of your Society – Chairman Gary Field, Carolyn Taylor, Debbie Lock, Karen Whiffen and Jeni Summerfield. It is nice to think that at Faringdon one is not viewed as “The Enemy” – YOU’D BE QUITE SURPRISED HOW SOME Societies view NODA Representatives!

Your Society has that warm feeling about it – where Community spirit is important. I’m sure you will get on well with *The Fort Erie Theatre Company* from Canada, and the return trip for you I’m sure will be an experience which you will enjoy, and learn something from. Good luck.

I have not seen your current production for some eight years – and if I’m honest, I didn’t enjoy it last time around. It was wordy, drawn out, and lacked enthusiasm by the cast – and we had twenty-six prompts! So on the way down to Faringdon on Saturday evening in the pouring rain, I wondered, what can I expect?

I had an enthusiastic cast, the show moved along with pace, every character was convincing, because they believed in themselves as that character. Whether this came from their own experiences on stage, or from the Director doesn’t really matter – they convinced the audience. Congratulations to all of you – you all seemed “hand-picked” for your roles.

Cast in order of appearance

- Algernon Moncrieff (Daniel Lander) – experienced performer, his stage craft showed. Excellent diction, and good facial expressions. Made good use of the stage, and he worked well with Jack and the rest of the cast. His timing was impeccable.
- Lane/Merriman (Austen Roberts) – was a very attentive butler, who did all that was asked of him, in a very dignified manner. I felt that the bushy eyebrows and hair in Acts 2/3 were a little over the top!
- Jack Worthing (Adrian Wells) – was in command of his character throughout, and he and Algernon bounced off each other at a rate of knots! Some nice touches with Gwendolen.
- Lady Bracknell (Sarah Varnom) – her personality beamed at you, like a powerful lighthouse flash! We were all left in no doubt as to whom was in charge. I’m surprised if the “vibrations” did not disappear from Ernest, as he was questioned as regarding his pedigree! Fine all-round performance.
- Gwendolen Fairfax (Jane Isham) – good characterisation, clear diction – and she stood her ground with Lady Bracknell – nice bit of acting. The fight with Cecily looked realistic, and the contrast when you became friends worked well.
- Miss Prism (Joan Lee) – I think she really enjoyed playing this character role – and again, her stage experience showed – wonderful facial expressions, especially at times towards The Rev. Canon! Again, clear, crisp diction – she also showed a special feeling towards Cecily.

- Cecily Cardew (Verity Crowdson) – well suited for the role – looked innocent, but had a special “sparkle” about her character. After all, she had £130,000 – that would put a smile on anyone’s face!
- Reverend Canon Chasuble (John Taylor) – another experienced performer, whose presence was immense. A Pillar of Society. Looked good on stage (except for those side-burns!) He stood erect, and delivered his lines with authority – and a sparkle for Miss Prism!
- Footman (Tim Evans) – Did not put a foot wrong!! (Difficult part to learn!!!)
- Director (Jeff Barry) and Assistant Director (Debbie Lock) – both can be proud of their achievements with this production. It was a great team effort. The directors and cast made sure that in the 21st Century, “Earnest” remains a favourite for so many. When you think of the dictionary meaning of Earnest (sincere, arduous, serious, money paid over in token to a blind bargain, pledge, foretaste), everything was covered admirably by the cast.

Production Team

- Stage Manger (Gary Field) and his Stage Crew – they carried out their tasks in a quiet efficient manner.
- Set design (Sally Seymour) – the 3 Acts were very pleasing on the eye, and well thought out. Perhaps in Act 2, Centre Stage, it might have been better to fit a patio door, with a small flat beyond that, giving a view of part of the garden. It would have added an extra dimension to the set. The pastel shades used in the morning room of The Manor House were excellent.
- Lighting and Sound (Ian Chandler and Gary Bates) – it was a well-lit set, and the sound effects were good, and not distorted in any way.
- Piano (Kathryn Whiffen) – this she had recorded for the production on tape
- Wardrobe (Jeni Summerfield and Joan Lee) – stunning costumes, in the correct period. Lady Bracknell’s Act 3 costume was outstanding. The men’s costumes from *Bath Theatrical Costumes* also looked good, were clean and well-fitting. Congratulations on the shoe shine – the butler must have had his work cut out! Your Society is so fortunate to have two such talented and dedicated ladies to look after your wardrobe – many a Society would give their right hand for such talent. If you had to hire all your costumes, it would cost a small fortune, and many would not be to the same quality that you are used to. They deserve an Oscar. Long may they continue their talent on behalf of your Society. Congratulations.
- Props (Kate Tempest) – had work3ed hard, I’m sure, to gather and co-ordinate all that you had on Set, plus individual props – no mean task.
- Prompt (Karen Whiffen) – a thankless task – but so important, as all casts know – and you did not let the side down!
- Programme (Dave Headey) – all the information was provided on good quality paper, and easy to read in subdued light – so important for so many people these days. Photographs of the cast were clear.
- Make-Up – no mention in the programme. I think it is important for someone to “oversee” this important area of any production. If any Society is striving for professional standards, then one would not expect laughter (as we had) due to, in my humble opinion, the way the character appeared – and this should not have been the case. The hair should have been “teased out”, and not put on the face like a clump – and the colour must be blended to the character’s natural hair. Just a small point, when one is striving for perfection. Another small point (nothing to do with make-up) – when sitting down, tails should be flicked back, not sat on – also I would have preferred the butler to have been handed the hat and gloves, rather than pick them up from the table!
- Front of House Co-ordinator (Denise Monk) – her team of Front of House Staff make you feel welcomed, with their smiles, their Faringdon T-shirts, NODA long-service medals – and above all encourage you to buy a raffle ticket, programme or a refreshing drink at the bar.

Thank you for another enjoyable evening, and the best of luck with your venture in September.

Gareth Jeremy, Region 12, London Area