

FARINGDON DRAMATIC SOCIETY in association with GARRISON LITTLE
THEATRE of Canada present
'LONDON SUITE' by Neil Simon. October 2011

'London Suite', which consists of four one-act plays, takes place with subsequent occupiers of one suite in a fashionable hotel in central London.

Producer, Debbie Lock, cleverly used part of the Sudbury House Hotel to create this scene (and loan of their furniture) and so a sumptuous set was created.

The evening started with a tasty three choice hot meal and a warm welcome from FDS and GLT front of house and then we took our seats in another room for the plays. I noticed the many lights at the back of the room set up by Gary Bates and John Roebuck.

Act 1 started with the first contribution from the Garrison Little Theatre, 'Settling Accounts', Brian (played by Dan Bennett), the inebriated writer, so hard to play a convincing drunk I believe but Dan played him beautifully, and Billy, (Chuck Jagiello) his business manager who is absconding with the writer's money. Dan waves a gun around threateningly and eventually wrestles the briefcase full of money from Billy. Director, Darka Makarec, created a menacing atmosphere as well as allowing us to laugh at Neil Simon's gags. A most entertaining start to our evening although I did feel the actors could contain their acting a little more in the intimate surroundings - they were projecting as if in a theatre. With more of these dinner/theatre evenings it is perhaps something to ponder over.

'Going Home' was the second play - an American widow, (Carolyn Taylor) and her daughter, (Sarah Couzens) from FDS are the next occupants of the Suite. Mother spends her last evening before 'Going Home' to America, with a rich Scotsman who develops a series of major allergies during the date ending up in hospital. Carolyn took us through the growing list of allergies, each worse than the last, that occurred during the course of her 'romantic' last evening out. Both their accents were believable and true and the ending, with Sarah showing her affectionate love for her Mother, poignant. Jeni Summerfield directed with a firm hand as usual.

After the interval came 'Diana and Sidney'. With Diana (Lois Wells) an Oscar winning actress, and Sidney (Simon Wisbey) her divorced husband and Diana's PA Grace, nicely played by (Katie Dyet). As a successful American actress in the 80s I would have liked much more make-up on Lois (think Joan Collins in that era) this was more Gwyneth Paltrow, I think this would have given Lois more drive and panache. She felt kind towards her ex-husband even though he had moved to a Greek island to live with another man and agreed to pay for his medical treatment. Simon had a lovely tan and a lovely, relaxed acting style although I would have liked to have seen a reaction when he took a brandy - it could have been cordial, I expect it was!

A few lost words moments - no prompt was used - but with these experienced actors they managed to get back on track - wonder if Director, Jo Webster should perhaps consider having a prompt?

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Loved the beautiful flower displays in the Suite, which were changed for each occupant, (props Carole Tappenden and Valerie Winslow). All the props showed a great attention to detail as we have come to expect from FDS and as is so necessary when the audience is so close.

The fourth and final playlet was 'The Man on the Floor' from GLT. Mark (Dan Bennet) and his wife Annie (Carole Ferriday) have travelled from America to go to Wimbledon and have LOST their tickets. Mrs Sitgood (Marie Hoyle) hotel manageress, wants them to move to another suite as Kevin Costner wants to move in - when Mark's back seizes up she refuses to acknowledge the chaos surrounding her, sends for the Doctor, (Rey Baecher) who ends up on the floor with the stricken Mark, when his back seizes up aswell. She instructs the Bellman (Adrian Wells from FDS) to look for the Wimbledon tickets but to no avail. Then he falls on the floor, on top of the other two, wails of pain from the actors and gusts of laughter from the audience. Chuck Jagiello directed this farce and kept it moving, a good ending to a series which incorporated drama, pathos and farce.

'Breakaleg' to Faringdon when they take 'Going Home' and 'Diana & Sidney' to Canada in May 2012.

Deidre Jones