

# Oxfordshire Drama Network

## ODN Review

This is a popular piece by Chekhov and many Drama groups enjoy the challenge of working with something that needs so much thought about a country and culture which is not familiar to many of us. Faringdon performed this play with style and obviously put a lot of thought into the detail. Their endeavours paid off and it was a thoroughly entertaining performance. I did like the gentleman's introduction, nice touch.

This tale of a family unwilling to accept the truth, is about how they must mortgage their beautiful house with the Cherry Orchard at public auction, in order to pay off their debts. The final blow is that a merchant from a poor background buys the property.

Before I talk about the actors I must compliment the costume people for a wonderful job. Costumes do not always get a mention except perhaps for Panto, but this time they are "topping the bill" Not just the costumes themselves, but the way the cast "wore" them Posture and deportment are so important with period pieces and this cast were extremely adept with this element of the piece. (one tiny point, it is not a good idea to wear a black bra with a white shirt on stage!)

The differences in class in this piece are quite pronounced and they were handled well by the actors. Despite the depth of regard for the loyalty of the servants, the hierarchy were still the elite and the servants knew their place in front of them.

The relationships between Dunyasha (Karen Whiffen), Yepikhodov (Dominic Bullock) and Yasha (Gary Field) was well acted and we knew how they were all playing each other off against the other. I would have liked just a little more sexual tension between them though. Dunyasha helped keep the plot moving with her playful personality and Yepi was suitably inept. Yasha was nicely aloof but should not have looked off stage when there was a little "blip" in the proceedings in Act 3 (very nicely recovered though everyone)

The mother Ranevskaya (Carolyn Taylor) was suitably distracted and sometimes impatient where she should have been. Well done- a passionate performance. I felt the warmth with her brother Gaev (Peter Webster) and the affection with her daughter Anya (Laura Coleman) also her reliance on Varya (Sandra Keen) I felt that Varya's voice could have had a little more "light and shade" in it for interests sake, but otherwise a nice portrayal. Gaev was concerned for his sister and portrayed his forgetfulness really well. Just a little niggle - He did not stand upright enough for his position and did walk in front of people a few times. Lost his billiard inferences, underplayed, I thought.. Anya was delightful and had a nice clear voice, congratulations for a newcomer... (I loved the way you handled your dress billowing out! I bet your friends teased you for that!)

Charlotta (Katie Dyet) looked perfect and the part was made for her with her magic skills (is she a member of The Circle?) She was brave to act with an animal and kept Poppy suitably under control especially when the prompt was in danger of being revealed! Firs (Dave Headey) was lovely and provided the sad and comic moments in the play. I was a little disappointed with his "hair" The crepe hair had not been pulled out properly so it looked curly, and there was a large white blob on his head from the "greying" material (white stick) Pishchik (Jeff Barry) also provided some comic moments with his predictable money requests and cheekiness towards the ladies. A point in the last Act was the acting tended to be across the stage a lot, rather than "North to South" There is more focus on the "important person or element" of the scene if actors stand slightly up and down stage from each other.

I was particularly impressed with Pyotr (Adrian Wells) I thought the stage came to life each time he came on. His timing and enthusiasm for his part were very enjoyable to watch. His relationship with the family was really well portrayed and very sincere. We could feel the tension and sadness concerning the past.

Finally, what can I say about Lopahkin (Daniel Lander) but, brilliant casting. He really did this part justice. His passion and commitment to making this part very special was very obvious to all ....(and, his beard was superb...has he still got it?) Congratulations.

The set was quite delightful and just enough to show comfort without crowding the room too much, therefore giving the dancing the space it needed. The dancing was a nice addition and elegantly performed by all. (Just a little note - the telegram did not look authentic. I am sure the paper would not have been pure white with no markings or official stamps on it.)

The lighting was nicely done and complimented the scene well. Be careful of women in large hats! (shadows!) Also, the scene changes deserve mention as they dressed for the part too. Nice touch.

I have been to quite a few shows at Faringdon and have been very impressed with their consistent high standard. I really enjoyed this performance and I complement all on a job very well done. Thank you and I look forward to watching the next one.

***Susi Dalton***