

Faringdon Dramatic Society

Murder at Checkmate Manor

by David McGillivray & Walter Zerlin Jr

Faringdon Junior School

8th-10th November 2018

Faringdon Dramatic Society, never to shirk a challenge, presented Murder at Checkmate Manor by David McGillivray and Walter Zerlin Jr on the stage of Faringdon Junior School from 8th-10th November.

This is no classic Whodunit, we know who the murderer is from the off, but it is an exercise in precise timing and prolonged rehearsal as this madcap comedy is chaos from start to finish. One problem with this style of 'The Play that Goes Wrong' genre when staged by Am Dram groups is you don't know whether the disasters are part of the proceedings or not. However, FDS came through with flying colours on a commendable Set by Peter Webster and team.

Ablly directed by Jo Webster, the show starts with an introduction from Debbie Lock and a slide show of the Isle of Man for some reason of which I'm not party.

Now it must be said that the five players in the piece play so many parts it is impossible to comment on all of them, suffice to say all served above the call of duty coping with such a disaster-stricken script.

Debbie Lock for instance plays five parts, all with suitable panache and enthusiasm. I'm sure she, like all the cast, had a ball at rehearsals.

Katie Dyet escaped with just two roles; the young vibrant daughter of the house and then an elderly wheel chair bound aunt.

Pandemonium reigned throughout the whole play. Hardly a word or a move went by without some staged theatrical disaster taking place and murders abounded with bodies littering the stage at every opportunity.

The killer was obvious from the outset, the dastardly Butler, Pawn (yes, yes, the Butler did it). Pawn played along with two other parts by Sandra Keen looked to be enjoying her part too much for my liking. The efficient cold calculating way she despatched her victims led me to hope she didn't work for the NHS.

Another hard-working thespian on the night was Sarah Couzens with four parts on her agenda. An excellent performance from Ms Couzens who executed her parts coolly and as ably as she could with such absolute chaos around her.

This just leaves Martin Waymark who got away lightly with only one part, that of Inspector O'Reilly.

Again, Mr Waymark threw himself into the breach and after sorting his accent out, which ranged from the Scottish Highlands to the Mountains of Mourn, he settled down and became a solid part of the show.

He was a busy chap with seven (I think) murders to solve plus a budding romance with Daphne Bishop (Katie Dyet - and who can blame him) he had his work cut out but came through in the end - top man.

This production is a play within a play and FDS interpreted the script with fine fettle. A valiant and rewarding effort from the initial intros to the final disorganised line-up.

Well attended for a first night and no prompts as I could hear, the audience certainly enjoyed the piece and so did I.

Lance Bassett

November 2018