

National Operatic & Dramatic Association

London Area



Society : FARINGDON DRAMATIC SOCIETY.
Production : HABEAS CORPUS by ALAN BENNETT.
Date : 6th NOVEMBER 1998.
Venue : FARINGDON SCHOOL.
Report by : GARETH JEREMY.

Report

It was a pleasure to accept Debbie Lock's invitation to review another of your Society's productions. May I congratulate your organization, on reaching it's 50th Birthday; long may it continue.

The Play - HABEAS CORPUS - as mentioned in the programme, this was one of Alan Bennett's earliest plays and it was a gem of it's time. It is also in fashion these days, as people wish to remind themselves of what happened during that era. (60's & 70's).

The Set.

Peter and Jo Webster are to be congratulated on the simplicity, but effectiveness of the set. We are all aware of the limitations of the stage, especially the depth that one has to work with. It may possibly have been improved if some 12ft x 4ft flats would have been placed on either side of the stage, rather than the black drapes, to give the appearance of more depth and painted in a light colour and then the lighting effect using different 'gels' may have helped.

Lighting and Sound.

Gary Bates, Ken Brown and Martin Whiffen. On the whole this was good. Some of the follow spots were not correct at the start of the play and sometimes actors on the extremities of the stage were not lit up, or only partially lit. This most probably improved during the run of the play, as the plot became better known to the helpers.

I would like to ask - how long before a show do the lighting/sound crew have a script and lighting plot of a show? months, weeks, or a few days before the show, when it is being rigged? I feel sorry for many 'back stage crew' as they only receive their instructions, JUST BEFORE THE DRESS REHEARSAL. Wouldn't it be helpful, to have greater liaison/communication between all the production teams.

Wardrobe.

Joan Lee and Jeni Summerfield, had done a good job and all the characters looked good on stage, dressed as required for the time.

Make-up.

On some of the cast, there seemed a lack of make-up; under the lights, a few looked very pale, looked as if they needed to consult a doctor, in contrast, Cannon Throbbing looked good. Characterization and facial make-up are essential, especially the fine tuning, e.g. where a very slight ageing is necessary; greying at the temples, a few shadows here and there would have done the trick. Mrs. Wicksteed, I think needed a slight 'toning down' or powdering, as it looked as if she had just returned from a long holiday in the South of France. (Perhaps she had, without her husband - Dr. Wicksteed. Congratulations to the cast, that no Prompt was mentioned on the credits of the Production Team; you are one of the few casts that I have known to be WORD PERFECT.

The Programme was plain and simple, but gave us the information required and could be read in semi-darkness.

Many thanks to all those working Backstage and Front of House, all so important to the success of any production.

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The Cast.

Dr. Arthur Wicksteed - Tim Reeves; seemed at ease in the character, looked a typical small, rural community doctor. Good diction and good facial expressions - especially when 'eyeing up' Felicity. This is the first time that I had seen this actor with you. Well done.

Muriel Wicksteed - Sarah Varnom. An experienced actress, having seen her before in 'Witness for the Prosecution' and 'Lark Rise'. Her presence on stage was felt at all times, - very demanding - good use of the eyes and hips, when trying to seduce Mr. Shanks and Sir Percy, have you ever tried 'belly dancing'? Worked well as the husband and wife team. A good contrast. Dennis Wicksteed - Gary Thompson. Poor Dennis - all together- Ah. Played the part very well, got into his character and played it throughout, with feeling and sincerity; you almost believed he hadn't long to live. Far more to do than in Lark Rise. I enjoyed your performance. Well done.

Constance Wicksteed - Lucy Walden - again one can say 'Ah.' poor Constance, but what a difference the 'Wonder Bra' can make to one's personality. Another experienced campaigner, who knows how to use her stage personality. Excellent contrast from the 'flat chested' lady - to the well endowed lady, excellent use of the 'flashing' eyes. She certainly knew how to entice the Vicar and twist him round her little finger. Another fine performance.

Mrs. Swabb - Theresa Moon. This was the first time that I have seen this actress on the boards, for your Society. This was a superb performance, the linchpin between all the actors - who kept us all on our toes, the ideal charlady, who knew how to keep a secret for 10seconds - a cross between Ena Sharples and Thora Hird. (No offence). This was a cameo part from the top drawer. Good clear diction, excellent facial expressions and superb timing. Congratulations.

Cannon Throbbing - Paul Garratt. I was impressed by Paul in Lark Rise and having seen him play the Vicar now, he is very adaptable at character parts. He looked the part, he played the part and he kept up his particular posture throughout. I'm not so sure if I would like to meet him riding his bicycle down some of the narrow streets of Faringdon. Excellent stage presence; I liked many of his scenes, the balance between him and Constance, his sincerity for her appeared very real and was convincing. Very good performance.

Lady Rumpers - Carole Tappenden. Seems type-cast for this kind of part. Last seen in 'Witness for the Prosecution'. She kept up the character throughout 'cut glass image', at times, the diction dropped a little only when there was a slight hesitation in knowing the script, word perfect. Looked good on stage and I think that Carole enjoyed playing the character.

Felicity Rumpers - Karen Pearce. Looked good on stage and certainly did not help the Dr.'s blood pressure and certainly made Dennis a MAN. Good contrast in her character when required and certainly gave the cast something to think about. A convincing performance. The first I have seen her with the Society.

Mr. Shanks - Roger Leitch. I expected this character to be more flamboyant and the extrovert photographer who would also have been the 'salesman', who could sell 'sand to the Arabs'. However we had a completely different character and he was 'pole-axed' by Mrs. Wicksteed; and came over well as the down-trodden wimp. He may have been embarrassed by not having trousers to wear for most of the production. Did you enjoy playing the character? If you did - then you gave a very convincing performance that YOU DIDN'T.

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Sir Percy Shorter - Dave Headay. Another experienced actor, who knows how to use the stage to his advantage. Good contrast in his character from panic to complete serenity. I liked the cameo, (Little and Large)- between himself and Muriel Wicksteed, who was trying to rekindle the flame of years gone by. Facial expressions were excellent, from dead pan to the 'flicker' of 'thanks for the memory'. Another first class performance.

Mr.Purdue - David Campbell. Very convincing portrayal, but nobody seemed to take him seriously, I liked the lighting effect when he tried to hang himself at the end Act 1. Convincing performance. Last time seen in LarkRise.

The Production.

Director - Jo Webster; Producer - Debbie Lock; and Assistant Director - Debra Keasal.

What an interesting show to direct. Jo and Debbie have led Faringdon D.S. to another success. You are fortunate in having such a talented and enthusiastic group of actors around you, willing to give of their best. Everyone entered into their character and gave the impression that they were enjoying themselves and giving entertainment to others. There were so many entrancing scenes, all different, lots of variety and all bringing out different emotions - joy, pathos, anxiety, embarrassment, etc., but above all the play flowed and had pace and as mentioned earlier, the impressario for me, was Mrs.Swabb, the way she kept us, the audience, on our toes, and thinking- what ever next.

My thanks to the whole company for such a happy production. Thanks again for the invitation to attend and for the usual friendly hospitality.

Very best wishes to you all.

GARETH JEREMY.

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