

FDS brings GBS to life

— no music needed

CLAIRE Green IS Eliza Doolittle. That's how they put it when billing star names in a big film — and I can think of no better way of crediting Claire for her astonishingly accomplished role in Faringdon Dramatic Society's performance of *Pygmalion*.

The choice of George Bernard Shaw's original play, for a modern audience so familiar with the musical version, was an inspired one. Particularly in the early stages, characterised by Eliza's ringing Cockney tones and Pro-

fessor Higgins' bullying swagger, one almost expected the cast to break into familiar song-and-dance. But by the end, the serious philosophy woven into Shaw's class comedy came through loud and clear.

If Claire gave us an authentic Eliza, then Dave Headey as Professor Higgins completed a superb partnership, which matured into the quite riveting scene when Eliza's growing confidence gives her the upper hand in delivering a masterful put-down to her erstwhile manipulative tutor. The sheer memory exercise involved in this prolonged scene is testing enough for both characters: but to bring such force to the words, and emotion to the verbal sparring, left this critic full of admiration.

Jean Thomas complemented the star roles with a very sympathetic Colonel Pickering, while Sarah Varnom brought great force of personality to Higgins' mother. Roger Leitch clearly enjoyed his role of the working-class philosopher, Alfred Doolittle, while Maggie Sly and Christina Willett were splendid as Mrs Eynsford-Hill and her daughter Clara — particularly in their supporting roles for the scene largely stolen by Claire with her tour-de-force portrayal of the Cockney-flower-girl-turned-lady-in-polite-company, who doesn't always remember her proper lines ("It is my belief that they done 'er in," she famously says, speaking of her late aunt).

Josh Smith cavorted as Eliza's gormless but likeable suitor, Freddy Eynsford-Hill. Joan Lee as the housekeeper and Karen Whiffen as the parlourmaid delightfully set off the domestic scenes, while Walther Schoonenberg brought his distinctive approach to the clever-dick linguist Nepommuck.

Paul Garratt, Debbie Lock (doubling as a flautist), Jill Headey, Chris Matic, Carole McDowall, Irene Schoonenberg, Jeni Summerfield, Peter Webster and Barry Willett completed a cast who were splendidly costumed, as always, and supported by lovely sets.

Carolyn Taylor directed and Kate Lord produced. — *LS*.



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Top picture: Professor Henry Higgins (Dave Headey) gleefully transcribes Eliza's (Claire Green) tortured vowel sounds.

Above: Alfred Doolittle (Roger Leitch) persuades Colonel Pickering (Jean Thomas) that he should be paid for letting Higgins 'improve' his daughter.