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Society : Faringdon Dramatic Society
Production : Side Effects
Date : 21st May 2016
Venue : Buscot House Theatre
Report by : Rob Bertwistle NODA Rep. District 12

Show Report

Firstly may I say many thanks to Katie Dyet for the kind invitation to review Faringdon Dramatic Society's latest production which was being staged in a different venue from their usual one – the beautiful and intimate theatre at Buscot House a magnificent stately home set in glorious grounds just outside Faringdon.

This was a wonderful setting for this quirky comedy by Eric Chappell – the action of which takes place in the visitor's room of a private nursing home.

The tiny theatre seating sixty-four people had a ready-made (and very appropriate) 'garden seen through windows' backdrop - the perfect scenery and stage for the setting of this production.

On my arrival I received a very warm welcome from the play's producer Carolyn Taylor and we had a brief chat about the play and the theatre itself. I also met the director Debbie Lock and it was good to get her perspective on the production.

The only thing that marred the evening was the typical British climate – it was bucketing down! So the planned pre-show picnic in the picturesque grounds had to be abandoned, sadly. However, this did not dampen the spirits of the enthusiastic and appreciative audience as we settled into our seats to enjoy the performance.

This comedy by 'Rising Damp' creator Eric Chappell was a little slow to get off the ground in the opening minutes – I think partly due to the 'intimacy' of the tiny theatre – the actors were very close to the audience but soon it was rattling along at a cracking pace.

The relatively simple lighting and sound design by Steve Greening certainly enhanced the production.

There were some unusual props, assembled by Fiona Merrick - for example an electric mobility buggy and walking aids - all of which were handled with great dexterity by the cast.

Debbie had assembled a very good cast of five for this production and all the actors fitted their characters very well. There were some delightful performances and diction was good. The stage was very small and Debbie did a good job of utilising the playing area to good effect ensuring the action never appeared to be 'cramped'.

Richard Lock was excellent as the irascible and cantankerous Frank Cook whose wife June has brought him to the nursing home for a week's respite which one suspects she will benefit most from. Frank has been taken ill with a mysterious rare medical complaint which renders him unable to walk without the use of crutches or a Zimmer frame. He is constantly carping and moaning about his lot and Richard

captured the character very well. He made the character's difficulty with walking look very believable. A very convincing portrayal and with virtually no time off stage a very challenging one also.

Katie Dyet was also very good as June his long suffering wife. She got just the right amount of sympathy and irritation with her husband and this was a well-judged and strong performance. June tries to help her grumpy husband even to the point of acquiring a mobility scooter for him to use which provided some hilarious moments in act two as it appeared to have a mind of its own! Katie's diction was clear and she used the stage well using the props in a very naturalistic way - for example moving cushions for her husband to support his leg. The mobility scooter sequence was a tour de force.

Gary Bates played the Reverend Paul Latimer a fellow 'patient' who is presently recovering from a heart transplant operation and is displaying some decidedly un-vicar-like traits as a consequence. This was a very good portrayal of a man of the cloth who seemed not quite sure why his behaviour has changed so dramatically. Gary used the stage well and maintained a clear speaking voice throughout.

Amanda Linstead played Paul's haughty and cut-glass voiced wife Sarah with relish. This was a lovely characterisation and her attempts to make herself attractive to her increasingly oddly behaving husband were very well done. This was a thoughtful portrayal and Amanda managed to convey the pathos and confusion that Sarah must have been feeling. She also had very good diction and used the playing area well.

Completing the cast was Bex Hutchings as Tracey the mysterious and rather strange girlfriend of Melvin who came to a sticky end when he rode his motor cycle too close to the edge of the Wall of Death (his occupation) and who we discover may be the donor of Paul's new heart! Bex captured this character very well and gave a very convincing portrayal of a grieving yet hopeful partner. She brought out the humour very well too and was suitably amorous to a bewildered looking 'Paul'. Well done!

I read with interest that the production is going 'on tour' to Fort Erie, Ontario, Canada no less and I wish you all the greatest success with this exciting venture.

Finally I would like to take the opportunity to congratulate everyone associated with the production and please forgive me if you have not been named individually. I had a most enjoyable evening and hope I shall be able to visit you all again soon.

Best wishes,
Rob

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