

Enid Cooper

NODA Representative : District 2

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Leighton Buzzard Drama Group - No Sex please we're British

Directed By Colin Aldous

Leighton Buzzard Theatre July 4th 2009

No Sex Please has the ingredients of a classic farce - mistaken identity, improbable situations, lots of doors, scantily clad females and falling trousers. All these ingredients were successfully brought to life by director Colin Aldous.

The excellent Russell Bennett, as Peter Hunter gave a strong confident performance with sharp line delivery and good facial expressions. Russell was matched by Lauren Stanley, his harassed wife Frances and Stuart Rourke, his bumbling conspirator Brian Runnicles. Stuart's voice and physical mannerisms, provided a good contrast to Russell. The two men worked well together, and were able to drive the plot along. Lauren demonstrated well a wife's difficulties with a domineering mother-in-law. With vocal variety and movement, she added to the sense of rising panic that is often the driving force of farce. These were three talented actors whose performances were entirely believable and whose acting abilities gave the play its energy and pace.

Bridgette Whittaker's interfering mother Eleanor Hunter was well cast, as were the other supporting actors. However they often lacked the variety of delivery of the three leads.

This was an intricate set, which worked perfectly and enhanced the action of the play.

Farce demands accomplished acting 'techniques', well timed stage-business and variety of pace; it has to be made to work without being blatantly gimmicky or overplayed. This was certainly achieved in Act 1 but perhaps less so in Act 2 when the pace slowed somewhat. Despite this, it was a very successful production, much enjoyed by an appreciative audience.

SHARNBROOK MILL THEATRE TRUST : ENTERTAINING MR SLOANE

Director: Paul Frecknall

Sharnbrook Mill Theatre 22nd September, 2009

This is probably the best known work by Joe Orton and the one that has, most effectively, withstood the test of time. Paul Frecknall's second production at the Mill managed to preserve the integrity of the play while introducing some nice original touches. In this he was well served by the small, but experienced, cast who worked hard together to create a very enjoyable and memorable experience. Both Annette Codrington and Kevin French were really excellent as sister and brother, Kath and Ed, vying for the affections of lodger, Mr Sloane. Each of these performances was well considered and convincingly maintained and developed as the play proceeded. They complemented each other perfectly and were among the best interpretations of these roles that I have seen. Paul Turton, as Mr Sloane himself, is a promising young actor who was particularly strong in the darker scenes and managed to convey a real sense of menace. In the smaller, but important, role of the elderly father, Kemp, Richard Duncombe was perfect, extracting every ounce of humour and vulnerability out of the part. An impressive 'tour de force'. This was a strong team production which totally held the attention of the audience and was embellished by the large and complex set, creating an appropriately intimate atmosphere in the challenging space of the

theatre. A final word of congratulation on the programme content which, at the Mill, is always interesting and informative.

Michael G Williamson

NODA Regional Representative : District 1

Leighton Buzzard Drama Group Murder by the Book

Directed by Ann Kempster

Leighton Buzzard Theatre September 24th 2009-09-26

Murder by the Book is a comedy thriller - a complicated plot with ingenuous twists and turns, couched in clever and witty dialogue.

The set was well designed, with excellent props and much attention to detail.

Director, Ann Kempster, was fortunate to be able to cast five talented actors. Randell Moll as the calculating Selwyn gave a tour de force performance. Barbara Springthorpe also gave an accomplished performance as his dramatic actress wife Imogen. The rapport between these two was excellent. Their verbal battles had all the right ingredients - good timing and delivery, and excellent pace. They gave much colour and energy to the many plot details. There was strong support from Debbie Kaye, the bewildered Christine and Stephen Clark as the blundering John. Stephen's facial expressions in particular, added much to the comedy. Carl Russell as Peter made his debut performance with the group - and what a confident and relaxed performance it was, with sharp, strong line delivery. This is a very promising actor who no doubt gained much working with such experienced actors.

Ann fully exploited the surprises in the script. She ensured clear plot expositions so that the audience were well able to 'keep up' with the changes. The comic elements were well directed, both in action and in words. The group fully met the challenge of this clever play. The elements of an intricate thriller with quick fire comedy were successfully combined to present an entertaining and very enjoyable production of a high standard.

Leighton Musical Theatre Company The Wizard of Oz

Director Heather Thorne

Musical Director Emma Miller

Leighton Buzzard Theatre - Thursday October 8th 2009

This production of The Wizard of Oz was entertaining and innovative. Director Heather Thorne was very fortunate to work with a team of considerable talent. Musical director Emma set a high standard and the orchestra added much musical light and shade. Emma had ensured well rehearsed singing especially from principals. Much praise also, to the technical team - imaginative costumes, colourful sets and the innovative and very well painted back projections, were an important element in the fantasy of this show.

Millie Burgoyne as Dorothy, sang very well and gave a confident, sympathetic performance. This despite having Toto in her arms most of the time, was no mean feat. Smirnoff (Toto) was delightful and amazingly well trained. Grant Sheehan (Lion), Nigel Allen (Tinman) and Matthew Wildsmith (Scarecrow) gave outstanding performances. The acrobatic flexibility of the Scarecrow contrasted well with the immobility of the Tinman, and Lion's nervousness. These were three very talented performers who worked perfectly as a team. Their line delivery was good with much pace and variety, and their physical performances were energetic and entirely appropriate to their characters. All three captured the fun and fantasy of the piece. Heather (Glinda) was an entirely convincing 'good' fairy. Christine Allen (Wicked Witch) looked the part but more contrast and variety in voice tone and line delivery would have created greater impact in this role. Phil Shell was very effective as the Wizard and Professor.

As is usual with this group, there was enthusiastic, effective support from the experienced chorus members. Happily, the show offered many opportunities for them to successfully undertake cameo roles.

Heather put much thought into this production and her innovations paid off. This was a most enjoyable evening which the appreciative audience certainly demonstrated.

Bedford Marianettes Scrooge - The Musical

Director Rebecca Toms

Musical director Richard Woodward

The Place Bedford - Friday October 9th 2009

Making their debut for the Marianettes, Rebecca and Richard demonstrated their talent and flair in this most successful production. The show had pace and energy. In the challenging space of The Place, with a minimal set, clever and slick scene changes, Rebecca ensured the changing moods of this piece were carefully plotted. Richard's musical direction perfectly reflected and complemented the pace and variety of the action.

This musical depends on the performance of its Scrooge and Brian Gedney gave a totally believable and confident performance in this role. In his voice, facial expressions and physical mannerisms, he demonstrated a range of emotions that perfectly captured Scrooge's transformation.

There were strong performances too from Rob Bartlett (Bob), Sian Hartley Booth (Isabel/Helen) and Jack Rubens (Nephew/young Ebenezer). These three sang well, were very convincing characters and contrasted well with Scrooge.

One of the many strengths of this production was the company. It has a wealth of talent and experience and this was well demonstrated in the cameo roles they undertook. All the cameo roles of the many Dickensian characters were well cast, entirely convincing and gave added colour to the story.

Musical numbers were well sung and choreographed. Richard ensured in tempo and tone, that they were appropriate to the mood of the moment. The story line and action flowed. This does not happen by chance but is the result of the director's skill. This was a very successful production which a full house obviously enjoyed. I look forward to Rebecca and Richard's next production already.

Barton Players A Funny Thing Happened on the way to the Forum

Director Gill George

Barton Village Hall October 29th 2009

This Sondheim musical offers many opportunities for amateur groups and director Gill George used these opportunities to produce an entertaining performance. In a simple but effective set, Gill ensured that the action of the musical moved smoothly.

John Murphy as Pseudolus gave a confident and comic performance. Pseudolus is the key central character and John certainly fulfilled this role. He is a relaxed performer and enjoyable to watch, he used facial and physical mannerisms to good effect in his portrayal of the quick thinking, opportunist slave. John's versatility and comic abilities were a major contribution to the success of the evening's entertainment. Andy Gookey gave another strong comic performance as the nervous, fastidious slave Hysterium. The character was well drawn and provided a good contrast to Pseudolus. These actors worked well together to provide much humour.

There was good support too from the rest of the cast. The stereotypical characters were well cast, and remained in character, providing contrasts throughout the play. Harold Liberty - Senex, Clare Brown - Domina, Richard Smith - Miles Gloriosus, and Mick George - Erronius, in particular were able to extract much humour from their characters.

Musically, the group were less confident. Their use of pre - recorded music imposed significant challenges on the cast. Much rehearsal is needed to ensure singers are synchronised with the music, both in rhythm, pitch and musical entrances at the beginning of each number. There were undoubtedly accomplished singers in the cast who were not entirely able to show their talents to the best effect, using pre recorded music.

Despite these musical setbacks, the group performed with energy and enthusiasm. These qualities served them well so that they successfully brought out the humour of this musical.

ADHOC The Lion in Winter

Director Gill Atterwill

Harrold Village Centre - October 30th 2009

Once again Adhoc took the small stage of Harrold Centre and transformed it: this time to the Middle Ages and the castle of Chinon. A simple but cleverly designed set and effective lighting, provided the backcloth to this drama.

Wayne Ross was a convincing Henry II. In a verbally and physically formidable performance, he showed the devious and manipulative nature of a king intent on selecting his own successor. Cathy Nicholls gave a powerful performance as his wife, Eleanor. Cathy ably captured the intelligence and intrigue of the queen, her maternal conflict and the emotional turbulence of her relationship with Henry.

All three sons convincingly demonstrated the conflicting personalities, inner demons and shifting alliances within the family. James Meredith was thoroughly believable as the ambitious but immature John. Simon Alaluf gave an appropriately controlled performance as the calculating but needy Geoffrey. Martin Vine's Richard was a good contrast to the others, emphasising his worldly, military experience.

Amanda Goggins' Alais was well portrayed, especially her development from submissive mistress of Henry to a forthright combative in the family war. As Phillip of France, Liam Mcniffe was convincing, showing a young man developing the diplomatic and devious skills of kingship

This was a strong cast who were well able to bring out the tensions, plots and counterplots within this royal family and all making a significant contribution to the conflicts of the play. Gill ensured that the elements of the complex plot were thoroughly explored so that the audience were able to follow every twist and turn in this intelligent production.

SHOWCO BLESS 'EM ALL

Director - Keith Pendall

Musical Director - Greg Sharpe

The Place Bedford - November 16th 2010

ShowCo's evening of nostalgia coincided with the 70th anniversary of the start of World War II, and in a performance of words, music and images, was both entertaining and emotional. Act 1 focused on the Great War and Act 2 the Second World War. Incorporating songs, poetry and readings, Keith produced a programme varied in mood, content and pace. In period costume, the cast evoked the atmosphere and memories of these traumatic events.

On a bare stage, Keith boldly projected moving images of both wars: these enhanced the events narrated incisively by the cast. Delivered in terse sound bites the numbers killed in the Great War, was particularly sombre and moving.

Greg Sharpe provided a strong musical element in which the company sang well and delivered songs with polish. They didn't believe me sung by Naomi Mudd, Pauline Corbyn's We'll meet again and Jenny Curzon's Roses of Picardy, all captured the moment vividly.

There were enjoyable Music Hall Tributes in Act 1 and Wartime Tributes in Act 2. Coylah Willock's Marie Lloyd, Gillian Brodie's Vesta Tilley, Paula Fraser's Gracie Fields and Richard Duncombe and Keith Pendall's Flanagan and Allen - all brought to life these familiar and well loved entertainers.

Poetry, readings and monologues were varied but befitting - Berni Curzon's moving recitation of Flanders Field and Richard Duncombe's monologues demonstrated dramatically, extremes of emotion, from sadness to humour. Richard in particular, gave a fine demonstration of his acting and comedic skills, with his monologues.

This was a very successful and moving journey into the past. That Keith was able to do this with humour and pathos and without sentimentality, is a tribute to his skills as a director and to the talents of the cast.

STEWARTBY AMATEUR OPERATIC AND DRAMATIC SOCIETY RUDDIGORE

Director - Prue Gardiner

Musical Director - Allan Thomas

Stewartby Village Hall 19th November 2009

Stewartby has an enviable reputation in the Gilbert and Sullivan world in Bedfordshire. This performance further reinforced that reputation. Director Prue and Musical Director Allan are skilled at ensuring not only that their productions are musically of a high standard but also that the libretto is imaginatively and amusingly interpreted.

A well rehearsed cast, some excellent soloists and an eighteen piece orchestra - the overall sound was thrilling. Choruses were very well sung, harmonies were melodic and there was an excellent balance between voices and orchestra. Once again Allan achieved musical harmony and was in command throughout.

Charlotte Garraway's voice was a delight. As Rose, she sang with expression and ease and gave a thoroughly believable performance. She was well matched with Charles Mills as Robin. Charles is another fine singer; a very relaxed and confident performer on stage who seems to exude joy in his performance which makes him very watchable. Alison Gibbs is an experienced and talented singer, and performer with a comedic skill. As Mad Margaret, her facial expressions and stage mannerisms put the madness into Margaret.

Prue is fortunate to have gifted singers, not only as principals but also in supporting roles. In other roles there were strong performances from experienced and able singers such as Carol Urwin as Zorah, Linda Bowen as Ruth, Shirley Hale as Dame Hannah, John Epton as Sir Despard, and Richard Hardwick's Old Adam. These in particular gave well sung, confident and convincing performances. Andrew Hodges as Richard was perhaps the least confident player and at times this showed in his performance.

Prue ensured a varied and lively pace throughout so that interest was maintained. This production had energy and the cast performed with enthusiasm and obvious enjoyment. A very entertaining evening and another achievement for this society.

SHARNBROOK MILL THEATRE TRUST : MACK & MABEL

Director : Paul Wildman

Musical Director : Mike Gibbons

Choreographer : Cleo Carter

Presented at Sharnbrook Mill on 20th November, 2009

The score for this show, immortalised for some by Torvill and Dean, is catchy and infectious, and it gives strong support to the action throughout. At Sharnbrook, the position of the orchestra on the upper tier and the excellent balance between the instrumentation and the performers made this a production to remember. I particularly liked the clever montage of photographs and the way in which they complemented the music, particularly during the overture. Add to this some original and fast moving choreography by Cleo Carter and the end result was very exciting. The keystone cops sequence was inspired but, in fact, all the movement within the ensemble scenes was neatly constructed and executed and the pace never flagged.

There was a cheerfulness and exuberance about the whole company which quickly transferred itself to the audience and I was impressed by both the singing and the individual characterisations. There were some nice performances from Jon Baish as Frank Capra, John Stevens as William D Taylor and Jim Goodbody and Ian Howat as Kessel and Bauman. Robin Harris was splendid, and surprisingly agile, as Fatty Arbuckle while Judith Tarrant displayed a fine voice and some complex choreographic moves as the delightful Lottie. However, the main burden of this show must always lie with Mack and Mabel themselves who are seldom off the stage and perform many of the numbers. In this respect, Sharnbrook were very lucky. David Passfield was totally believable as Sennett, sensitively combining his obsession with his work with his rather gauche attitude towards his personal life. As Mabel, Leanne Shorley was absolutely entrancing, demonstrating a maturity beyond her years. Leanne has a strong, and very appealing, stage presence and it was impressive to watch the way in which her character developed as the plot unfolded. This was a tuneful and colourful performance that was greatly to the credit of Director, Paul Wildman, the full production team and the entire company.

Michael G Williamson

NODA Regional Representative : District 1