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Society : Mortimer Dramatic Society
Production : Gaslight
Date : Friday 1st June 2018
Venue : St John's Hall - Mortimer
Report by : Jeanette Maskell

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This Victorian psychological thriller is gritty dark and powerful. The script requires in depth characters and some skilful acting from the cast.

Unfortunately on the evening of my visit the cast found themselves floundering with their lines which impacted on the fluidity of the action and the dramatic impact.

Iain Vernon Wilson – (Jack Manningham) – What a shame this actor had such a poorly throat. However he coped admirably and although he had to keep coughing to clear his throat his dialogue was clear and well enunciated. What an ignominy then that he struggled to remember his lines. His characterisation was maleficent although I felt he could have been even more sinister. His facial expression certainly had an evil look and was greatly enhanced by his striking vivid eyes. He interacted well with everyone on stage and I especially liked his treatment of Bella

Sarah Roper – (Bella Manningham) – This actress was brilliant with an excellent characterisation. Her dialogue was superb going from hysterical to euphonious, frightened to confident whilst maintaining the highest quality of diction and projection. She created an atmosphere of neglect which was almost tangible and her interaction and rapport with Jack and Inspector Rough was totally believable. You could sense her turmoil as she tried to establish who was telling her the truth and her breakdown where she visibly trembled was totally realistic. It is a credit to her that she took control kept the action moving and was able to maintain her character while Jack and Rough muddled along.

Kerry Thomas – (Elizabeth) – What a quietly understated performance this was! She displayed a genuine concern for her mistress which was totally believable as was her character. Her down to earth relaxed unhurried persona was spot on and she even had a twinkle in her eye for those rare comedic moments. Her dialogue visuals and movement were all first rate and she looked and sounded comfortable and at ease with the role.

Helen Sharpe – (Nancy) – This young lady was delightful as the very forward maid trying to advance her status by seducing the master! Her character was skittish animated and provocative. She delivered her dialogue with a bold flirtatious air which was clear and audible at all times. Her facial expressions are quite magical and lit up the stage on every entrance. It was clear to all that she had no sympathy for her mistress and was only too pleased to put her down and demean her at every opportunity.

James Burton Stewart – (Sergeant Rough) – This actor had the character spot on. Secretive mysterious friendly and sincere! Dialogue was well delivered clear and audible however he fumbled lines repeated himself and lost continuity. Whether it was nerves or the director had

asked him to; he paced around far too much. Sometimes less is more! He forged a creditable rapport with Bella and Elizabeth and he certainly gave Jack cause to squirm.

John Bull – (A Man) – If there's a spare character that needs filling this SM is your man. He played his part well but maybe tying Manningham to the chair was not such a good idea!

Lawrence Picking – (Director) – This director must have been pulling his hair out! When you have worked so hard to bring the characters to life and create a dramatic piece of theatre it must be heart breaking to see your cast lose the plot like that. I'm sure that the subsequent performances went smoothly. The audience however were not perturbed by this and during the interval I heard several members of the audience speculating on how the play would end. Staging was well devised; although there were one or two occasions when cast members were masked or upstaged. Even though certain cast members had a nightmare with their dialogue I could see that he had worked on their characterisations and the relationships therein. All that said this was still an enjoyable and entertaining performance.

John Bull – (Stage Manager) – With all the action taking place one set there was nothing for this SM to do other than ensure nothing major happened to the set and that cast had unobstructed entrances.

Mari Fleming – (Producer) – This producer is to be congratulated on bringing all aspects of the play together so that everything ran smoothly from start to finish.

John Bull/Members – (Set Construction) – I really liked this set; it immediately transported you to a typical Victorian drawing room. It had been extremely well constructed and painted and the gas lamps on the wall were totally authentic as was mantelpiece and fire surround. The back drop which you could see through the window had good perspective and created the illusion of being on street.

Amy Collins/Judy Winter – (Wardrobe) – This pair had put together a super set of costumes all of which looked exactly right for the period. Jack looked every bit the Victorian gentleman whilst Bella's frock was distinctly of the era. Elizabeth's maid uniform was just right though it was a shame the headdress didn't stay on and Nancy's posh frock was fabulous.

Suzan van Rhoon/Karen Dignan - (Props/Sound) – I'll start with the props which were superb. The set had been exceedingly well dressed with all furniture being of the period and I particularly liked the coal scuttle fire irons and the table lamp. The fire burning in the grate was an exceptionally clever idea and really added to the overall appearance. All other props were appropriate for their usage; hip flask tea service glasses and medicine phial. Sound as always in this venue was good and could not be faulted

Katja Hunt/Mick Snyder - (Lighting) – This was a superb plot and one that needed precision cuing; with the lighting, dimming and brightening of the lamps! This I am happy to report worked brilliantly. General lighting was great with every corner of the stage well lit ensuring the cast was never in shadow.

Members of the Society – (Front of House) – I was greeted by a lovely lady whom I had not met before. She was delightfully friendly and took great pleasure in showing me to my seat

Thank you

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Jeanette Maskell – NODA Representative - London Region - Area 13