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Society : Mortimer Dramatic Society
Production : Waiting for God
Date : 28/10/2022
Venue : St John's Village Hall, Mortimer
Reviewer : Cate Naylor

Show Report

Thank you for inviting me to your production of 'Waiting for God' and to your Front of House team for making me feel so welcome on my first visit to the society. The play, set in the BayView Retirement Home introduces us to Diana Trent and Tom Ballard who both reside in the home and are determined to grow old ungracefully. The play follows the interactions and relationships that Diana and Tom have with their families, staff, and other residents at the home. The script is funny and full of adult humour, but between the one liners and quick wit, there is an important message about how society values and cares for old people.

I understand that unfortunately a member of the cast was unable to perform on the night I attended, but in true fashion of "the show must go on", other cast members stood in.

Cast

Mari Fleming (as Diana Trent) and **Michael Kimber** (as Tom Ballard) defined their characters with clarity and had lovely chemistry. They delivered their lines with great comedic timing and brought the audience to fits of laughter on several occasions. Together they created a very believable friendship and a non-traditional love story.

Mari captured Diana's caustic comments beautifully with well-timed delivery. In contrast, to this, talk of her niece's expected baby had her showing Diana's underlying vulnerability and sense of wasted opportunities.

Michael had a lovely twinkle in his eye and charmingly portrayed Tom's naughty streak and descent into dementia. He also achieved the weariness of his character giving the sense that he was no longer in charge of his destiny but at the mercy of his relations.

Tom Shorrocks as slimy Harvey Baines ran BayView Retirement Home with firm hand and was clearly most interested in making a profit, whatever the cost to the residents. Tom managed to make Baines so obnoxious that when Diana attacked him with her walking stick in a very vulnerable area, I felt he got his comeuppance. His subsequent painful gait as he left the hospital brought some lovely physical humour.

Dawne West as Jane was efficient in her role managing the residents, effectively showing her frustrations as she frequently locked horns with Diana. Jane is a romantic character, desperate to be married, particularly to Harvey Baines, and gets her way in the end. Developing more of the soppy lovesick side of her character would have added to her characterisation.

Gary Wilson (Geoffrey Ballard) was Tom's good-hearted but incredibly dull son. Gary certainly captured the boring side of Geoffrey whilst trying to deal with the fact that his marriage was a disaster and his wife wanted to put his dad into a home.

Diana's niece Sarah was played confidently by **Cathy Ramsell**. Time is slipping by, and she wanted advice from her aunt on whom to marry (maybe not the best person to ask bearing in mind her views on marriage). Cathy developed a lovely relationship with her fiery aunt and the scene where she informed Diana that she wanted her to be present at the birth of her baby was very funny, but also poignant. Cathy had very clear diction and line delivery.

John Bale (Basil the Bayview stud) and **Jean Chapman** (Milly) two other BayView residents were brilliant in their characterisations and with no words, but plenty of expressive facial expressions and gestures they made it very clear that the food served was not fit for purpose!

Jean Chapman (Mrs Williams the organist and the midwife) Jean played the part of the organist very well with realistic gestures and body language and really looked as if she was playing the organ. She also stood in as the midwife and gave a lovely comic turn as she delivered Sarah's baby.

Mary Auckland (Reverend Denise Sparrow) This was a lovely cameo role and Mary played the absent-minded vicar to a tee. She had clear characterisation, strong stage presence, and worked very well

with her fellow cast members. It is very easy to overplay a comedy part, but Mary had just the right amount of humour without becoming a caricature. Mary also stood in as the Doctors and was credible in her portrayal. She had clear diction and was very professional in her approach.

Kerry Thomas (Maid and Undertaker) These two parts were played at short notice by the director. As the undertaker, Kerry had lovely comic timing with her wheeling the coffin on and off and interrupting the two weddings. She really looked the part and managed the role perfectly.

Creatives

Kerry Thomas (Director) This was Kerry's first time directing and together with **Katja Hunt** (producer) she gave us a believable production. Kerry had clearly worked hard with the actors to create their characters and relationships and they worked well together. As with all TV series written for the stage, the challenge is to balance the casting to have attributes of the original whilst allowing the actors to develop their own characterisation which Kerry did. I liked the design of the stage which was imaginative, realistic and used well to enhance the action.

Sue Bonnard (Stage Manager) assisted by **Phil Collins and Kerry Thomas** ensured that the wings were kept clear so that the actors had ease of access to the stage; no mean feat with the amount of set pieces being moved. There were very many set changes, (I lost count of the number of times the bed came in and out), but all the changes were managed very smoothly quickly and quietly.

George Hindmarsh and Mick Snyder (Lighting design), **George Hindmarsh** (Lighting and Sound Operation) The lighting design was simple but realistic, and the stage well lit. Spots were used effectively when the action was more intimate.

The sound effects were managed well and cued on time. I really liked the use of music in the scene changes.

Neil Johnson, Tom Shorrocks, John Bale and Society Members (Set design and build) The set was well designed and of a high standard, adding realism to the stage, and contributing to the overall impression of the production. The doors into Diana and Tom's rooms were very realistic and

reminiscent of residential homes I have visited. The swivelling flat that served as the backdrop to the hospital and Tom's bedroom was very effective.

Nick Pounder and Gemma Pounder (Set Painting) The set painting gave some lovely detail to the set. I particularly liked the impressive painted organ complete with organ pipes and the stained-glass window in the church scene.

Sarah Roper (Floral Displays) The floral displays were a lovely touch and reminded me of an English country garden.

Alys Codd (Set Dressing and Properties) The set dressing and properties were perfect for the setting and worked very well. There were some lovely touches to add realism; the hospital screen and bed worked well, and Diana's underwear strewn around the bedroom was very comical.

Amy Collins (Costumes) assisted by **Katja Hunt** The costumes were appropriate and reflective of the setting and overall production. The quick costume changes were efficiently managed meaning that there were no awkward moments waiting for someone to come on.

Kerry Thomas and Cathy Ramsell (Prompts) This is a very wordy play, particularly for the two leads, so having a prompt must have been of reassurance to the actors.

Thank you for an enjoyable evening and congratulations to the cast and production team. I look forward to joining you again in the future.

Cate

Cate Naylor - NODA Representative - London Region Area 13