



Be inspired by amateur theatre

Society : Mortimer Dramatic Society
Production : Murder by the Book?
Date : 27/01/2023
Venue : St John's Hall, Mortimer
Reviewer : Cate Naylor

Show Report

Thank you so much for the invitation to your theatre supper performance of Murder by the Book, we were made to feel very welcome by Jean and the rest of the front of house team. We had a lovely evening, and it was great to meet so many of the society after the show.

The style of the production worked very well with the performance in three parts with courses in between. The first two acts romped along with pace as we got to know the characters and the background to the murder. In act three, there were perhaps one or two moments when the pace and direction of the performance lost a little momentum, but the cast showed their professionalism by quickly picking up the action again as the murderer confessed.

It was fun to chat with the other people on our table as the evening progressed and to interview the suspects as they walked around the tables in between acts. I am glad to say that after much deliberation, we picked the right murderer, but with the wrong motive for murder... not bad!

Cast

Tom Shorrocks (Inspector Grim) With his West Country burr and measured delivery, Tom was every inch the country detective sent to solve the murder at Stratfield Grange. He skilfully guided us through the background to the murder and the investigation, urging us to make our own deductions about "who did it" and to succeed in our application to join the Shire-Rock Detective Agency. Tom had a quiet authority and whilst giving the impression that he was slow and steady was definitely on top of the investigation and ready to "get his man.. or woman". As the Inspector he cleverly portrayed a pivotal character in the production but without ever overshadowing the other cast.

Darren Reed (Horace Blanchworthy) was very clever in his portrayal of Horace, giving just enough information for us to know who he was and how he fitted in, whilst managing to stay a little under the radar. He came over initially as a quiet and rather caring man, concerned for his employee Dilys, but completely changed when he was found guilty of being the murderer. He was almost crazed in his assertions of how outrageous it was that Lord Fartesque Gushing didn't understand the value of his artefacts ranting and raving as he crashed around the stage. I liked that he carried the big book with him as he came into the audience which later turned out to be where he concealed the murder weapon!!

Kerry Thomas (Dilys Crumhorn) had the measure of the character, she was unsure, lacking in confidence and near to tears much of the time. She clearly showed Dilys' horror that she might be accused of murder and was quick to give Horace an alibi, therefore securing her own. She was 'all of a dither' when the truth of why she left the village for an extended period of time came to light and gave a reason for her motive to kill Lord Gushing and had us feeling sorry for her and ready to forgive her if she was the murderer.

Sam Foad (Irving Turnpike) was very pompous with a supercilious demeanour. His posture was upright and verging on arrogant. As the "professional" actor in the group, he definitely gave the impression that he thought that he was superior to some of the others. When he was accused of moving artefacts from the manor, he showed a different side to his character as he momentarily dropped his smarmy persona and you saw a flash of anger. During the cast walk about, he seemed to keep himself to himself, we certainly did not see him at our table... maybe he thought himself above talking to the hoi polloi?

Dawne West (Titty Honeygot) was quite a flirt, ready to try it on with any new man she met, including the Inspector. Dawne had a subtlety in her advances, and it was clear what her intentions were, although developing this a little more would have made it more amusing. She showed her openness to give her reason for being upset with Lord Gushing, but strong in her assertion that she could never have murdered him.

Phil Collins (Morton Dogsboddy) was perfect as the resentful and aggrieved young man. He delivered his lines with a fierceness that made him rather scary, and you could believe that he might murder his boss in a fit of anger. Although many of his lines were shouted, he had clear diction meaning that you could hear every word. His body language was assertive verging on aggressive and he stayed in character all the time even when not involved in the action.

Sarah Roper (Lady Lalage Gushing) had gravitas and decorum in her portrayal of Lady Gushing. She was very sure of herself and was not afraid to admit she wanted out of her marriage. Sarah had the perfect accent for a woman of breeding with clipped tones, and clarity and she carried herself with dignity as she moved around the room. She maintained her character perfectly as she made her way around the tables and gave her little tit bits with a twinkle in her eye making it very difficult to know if she was telling the truth or feeding us red herrings.

Creatives

Tom Shorrocks (Director) along with **Alys Ware** (Producer) had worked hard with the cast to develop believable characters each with their own foibles and character traits. They had created a setting for the actors to feel comfortable and invested in their characters so that they worked well together and bounced off each other very easily. Having them come off stage in the intervals to answer questions was a clever touch as it enabled them to bring their characters close to the audience to direct or misdirect their deliberations.

Alys Ware (Writer, Producer, Props Set Dressing and Off-stage Policeman). Alys was one busy lady, having written the murder mystery and been involved in so many aspects of the production. The story was a typical murder mystery format and Alys had devised interesting and credible suspects. Not a lot was given away, so it meant that we had to work hard and deliberate a lot to come up with our suspect! The set was dressed very and in keeping with the era and with some lovely period furniture.

Gary Wilson (Stage Manager) assisted by **Amy Collins and Alys Ware** Although there were no changes of set, there were some comings and goings of the cast and delivery of props to the set which were managed smoothly by the team.

Tom Shorrock and Neil Johnson (Set Design) assisted by **Society Members** and **Nick Pounder** (Set Painting) The set was excellent and there was an audible gasp as the tabs opened and the library full of books was revealed. The wall-to-ceiling library shelves with hundreds of colourful books were very effective and very eye catching. I understand that the rows of books were designed on a computer using a series of building blocks of different books which were then combined together to give panels of bookshelves which were printed on a roll of wallpaper and applied to the flats. Wooden beading and mouldings were used to give a three-dimensional effect to the shelves. The rest of the box set had been painted with wooden panelling and there was a portrait of Fortesque's father Lord Mottram Gushing gracing the back wall. The set

Katja Hunt, George Hindmarsh and Mick Snyder (Lighting Design and Operation) The lighting was effective and combined a fully lit set with some clever use of spots when the cast froze and Inspector Grim broke the fourth wall to speak directly to the audience.

Chris Chapman (Sound) had used sinister background music to start each act which set the atmosphere for the play.

Amy Collins (Costumes) The costumes were well thought out and each one appropriate for the character. There was a nice distinction between the classes with Lady Gushing in particular, in very fine clothes and jewels and Mottram looking like the working country man that he was. Irvine's cravat was very fitting for the debonair thespian

Peter Allison (The Home Chef) and **Jean Chapman** (Catering). The dinner was excellent and very tasty, a real credit to the chefs who managed to feed so many people around the performance.

Thank you once again for your kind invitation. This fine cast presented a highly entertaining and high-quality performance in an effective murder mystery format while the accompanying dinner made the evening all the more enjoyable and memorable. I am certainly looking forward to my next opportunity to see Mortimer Dramatic Society on stage again.

Cate

Cate Naylor
NODA London District 13 Representative.