



Society : Loughton Amateur Dramatic Society  
Production : Jamaica Inn  
Date : 25<sup>th</sup> June 2016  
Venue : Lopping Hall  
Report by : Jacquie Stedman

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### Show Report

I was very pleased to attend your latest production, in the company of the National Vice President of NODA, Michael Hastilow, to report on a theatrical re-telling of a classic novel by Daphne du Maurier.

Stories we read when we are young are very different when we re-visit them as mature adults and this was no exception. One forgets just how dark and murderous the story is and your interpretation brought that very much to the fore, thus giving depth to the main protagonists.

Lisa Evans' dramatization was skilfully written and very descriptive within the dialogue, giving us, the audience, a very clear picture of the characters and their background stories.

Congratulations must go to your set designer, Stephen Radley who interpreted the Director's vision and designed and constructed a multi-functional set on three levels which served all the locations of the action without the need to move and position scenery – thus allowing ample opportunity for the pace of the production to be maintained throughout. The half wall worked well giving a very clear delineation of another part of the house with a door SR. The sign creaked convincingly and was eerily lit at the end – all adding to the atmosphere. The lighting and sound plot (Terry Tew and Andrew Rogers) provided atmosphere and authenticity. The telling of the wrecking of the ships with the faint effects of screaming and destruction left the audience in no doubt as to the brutality of the wreckers and their murderous intent. My one criticism of the sound was the initial reading of the letter by Aunt Patience, which although recorded, was badly muffled, which did not make for a real understanding of why Mary Yellan was going to be arriving at Jamaica Inn.

For a non-musical society I thought you all coped with the songs (and the singing) exceptionally well. The songs themselves added a lot of atmosphere to the story and enhanced the action in many places. The ingenuity of the composer (under the guidance of the Director, one assumes) was very evident and you were very lucky to happen upon such a talented person offering his services. It was very evident that some of the cast had a lot of experience in singing in solo roles, but the ensemble produced a good tuneful sound. The Woman obviously had a lovely voice and it was a shame that, in places, she did not have sufficient volume to tell her story in song. If you have a song to sing then do it confidently and with assurance...remember the little old lady at the back of the hall with a hearing aid!!!

Likewise with accents. You all did extremely well with your Cornish accents and they appeared to be consistent, although some were clearer than others. Please remember (and I'm sorry to bang on about this) you have had several weeks learning and rehearsing your lines so you know exactly what is

being said and what the next move in the story is.....the audience does not have that advantage – they only have the one night to listen, understand and appreciate the dialogue. Therefore, it has to be as clear as possible - and with accents, even clearer – otherwise all your hard work and acting technique is wasted.

Your Wardrobe Mistress (Liz Adams) really had her work cut out sourcing such authentic costumes, but it was all worthwhile! Everyone looked 'real' and suitable in their period attire – footwear was unobtrusive under skirts, but the men's boots and shoes were suitable as were hairstyles and whiskers. The whole look of the production felt right and transported us to the Cornwall of the 1820s.

Stage Management, under the control of Cathy Naylor, was seamless. Jean Cooper sourced her properties well and was very resourceful in circumstances which could have proved difficult. I particularly liked her 'War Horse moment'. Both props ladies (unfortunately the other is unnamed) dressed appropriately when necessary and the fairground proved amusing with upstage activities and bunting being brought on by the props 'department'. The cast made use of the set in creating the coach and all within moved in time with the rhythm as if it really was moving.

This was a well cast production with a lot of physicality and menace. I know how hard it had been to find the right available people but you succeeded, and it is to your credit that the various delays did not affect the finished performances. This seemed a large cast for a LADS production but it all worked well and when the stage was full everyone was aware of their positioning and their movements.

The Woman (Amanda Smith) was a bit of an enigma as I was unsure of her role – was she the spirit of Mary's mother? Her conscience? Just a link between the action? In fact, at various points in the story she was all these things and, because her role seemed so fluid, it worked well. Her dialogue was very clear and she moved with confidence. You have a lovely voice so I won't repeat my comments about volume – you just need confidence!

Aunt Patience (Louise Levy) was the personification of the downtrodden wife of the time, who refused to leave her husband despite the fact of being so unhappy. And I suppose that is understandable – where would she have gone and how would she have supported herself? However, there were times when she appeared to be a bit unhinged in the telling of her experiences of meeting important people. This exaggeration of her life may well have been her attempt at trying to cover the misery of her life. Her regard and concern for Mary appeared genuine, as was the fear of her husband.

Mary Yellan (Katie Clarke) was outstanding and absolutely believable all through. The variances in her manner were clear, her determination strong, and the fear of her uncle, well hidden. In fact she showed such strength of will and courage it was difficult to see how she would survive at Jamaica Inn. Her accent was solid and her voice clear throughout, and she was able to show such a range of emotions it was a joy to watch her performance. She must have been black and blue by the end of the run due to the manhandling she suffered at the hands of both her uncle and his band of ruffians. The way she told of her capture was graphic although no one touched her during this speech – well thought through!

Joss Merlyn (Lee Kenneth) was a thoroughly unsavoury man and Lee interpreted this character with conviction. He didn't so much play the character as inhabit the man, even down to taking his bow in the line-up with a scowl and surly expression – which actually seemed very fitting. He dominated the stage, whether he was showing his dominance over women, his brusque leadership of the smugglers or his submission to alcohol. From the time Mary arrived at Jamaica Inn I was waiting for Joss to assault her. He had shown himself as having no patience or affection for his wife so it followed that his attitude towards women would transmit itself to Mary. It was rather strange then, that he said how much he trusted her later in the play by telling her the story of the wrecking. This was done with such clarity after his 5-day 'bender', and he spared no detail. The tone of his voice and his body language showing no signs of remorse either. Everything about him, voice, stature, movement, portrayed menace – even when he was drunk.

Francis Davey (Michael Lewkowicz) made a very convincing parson and appeared to have all the attributes associated with that position. It made his eventual discovery as the 'main man' as far as the smugglers were concerned that much more surprising. However, it would have been more believable if he could have shown more fire and conviction at that point – a change in the tone of voice would certainly have helped reinforce the fact when revealing this to Mary. I didn't feel he was quite nasty enough! However his death and fall were very convincing.....should there have been more 'fog' on the moor?

Jem Merlyn (James Kenneth), although a scoundrel, was not in the same menacing league as his brother and he had a much softer and emotional side to his character. He gave the impression of a bad man waiting to be saved by a good woman – in this case it would be Mary – and at the end of the story was genuinely touched by the fact that she would rather go with him than return to Helford. James delivered both songs and dialogue with volume and conviction and was a sure presence on the stage whenever he appeared.

Bassat (Jon Gilbert) and Mrs Bassat (Wendy Butler) were well suited as a couple, well dressed and looked suitably upper class, with Mrs Bassat showing genuine concern for Mary's situation.

The band of brigands who appeared in Act 1 in the Inn were a real motley crew whose outward appearance belied their villainy. Lots of Cornish accents mingling with each other could have done with a bit more clarity. However they all were obviously under the command of Joss Merlyn and, appropriately, somewhat in awe of him.

The chorus, who supplied much volume during the songs and good background players were Foster Barnett, Martin Howarth, Sandra Davidson and Neil Grosvenor. Other roles were played by members of the company making this altogether a real team collaboration.

This was a most interesting and challenging piece of theatre for players and audiences alike and it is very much in the style of a LADS production to push the boundaries and rise to the occasion. Well done to you all!!

Thank you so much for inviting Michael and I backstage on Saturday night – you must have all been so exhausted – but you made us very welcome. Congratulations also on your successes the following day – all justly deserved I must say!!

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