



Society : Loughton Amateur Dramatic Society
Production : An Inspector Calls
Date : 17/6/11
Venue : Lopping Hall
Report by : Jackie Mitchell

Report

This was another interesting play, in the style of a rather unusual detective story, with a very interesting twist at the end, which allowed for some very strong performances and giving a very insightful look at the more unpleasant side of some aspects of human nature. With generally strong and well balanced performances all round, this was an interesting and entertaining evening out.

A rather difficult play to stage, with the action moving from the dining room to the terrace and garden, the set was, as always, impeccably done. The beautiful, and rather boldly coloured dining room set at the back of the stage provided a nice foil for the more natural environment of the terrace area situated down stage, and the various pieces of stage dressing were well placed, and natural, adding realism to the scene. Having the dining room set so far back meant that at times, the cast and action seemed rather distant from the audience, and this did somewhat reduce the connection between the audience and cast (some kind of zoom in lens would have been useful!), and particularly in the opening scene, with the entire cast sited around the table, there were times when the speaker could not be clearly seen from the audience, however, overall, the set design worked well to help generate a plausible environment for the action to take place. Lighting too was well used to add to the plausibility of the set, with the rather artificial light of the dining room area complemented by the softer seeming lighting in the terrace and garden areas, and the clever touch of the light on stage left to suggest light from the house was a very nice touch. As always, the very realistic, simple yet clever combination of set, props and lighting was an ideal environment for the action played out.

Costuming for all the characters was appropriate for the period and character. The men's suits were all well fitted, and looked smart, while the ladies costumes had some nice detailing, the buttons on the back of Sheila's dress were a particularly nice touch, although the multitude of layers in Sybil's outfit did look a little odd, and the fabric of her costume seemed a little modern looking under the stage lighting.

With a cast of seven, the show rolled along at a nice pace, and there were some very good performances from all on stage. Andrew Rogers gave a strong turn as the rather demeaning and superior Arthur Birling. He seemed very natural on stage, and gave the appearance of a man very secure in his arrogance and power. On occasions he rushed his dialogue slightly, but this was overall a very strong and confident performance of what was really a rather dislikeable character, so quick to distance himself from any chance of wrong doing.

As his wife, Sybil, Wendy Butler, was suitably snobbish, although she did lack a little variety of expression at times, and seemed to have a little trouble with some of her lines, which may have been responsible. Her reaction to the photo however was very good, nicely understated, and she had some great facial expressions giving her a real haughty and rather unlikeable edge, matching that of her husband – her attitude to her supposed crime much as his was.

As the rather more tender-hearted Sheila Birling, Roz Gerrie gave a confident performance as a rather sweet and genuine character. She did have a tendency to recite a little during her long speech, however, in general, her dialogue seemed very natural, and she was a very pretty and likeable character.

In contrast, Spencer Mills, as her brother, Eric, was very convincing as a rather dissolute and spoilt young man on the cusp of adulthood, he seemed very natural on stage, and his upset at the events that unfolded throughout the play was very well judged.

As the 'perfect' fiancé, David Stelfox gave a nice performance as Gerald Croft. On occasion his characterisation lacked a little depth, and a little more fire and passion in some of his dialogue would have lifted this slightly, also, longer pauses when on the 'phone, to allow the person at the other end to speak, however, he had some great facial expressions, and worked well with the others of the cast.

Sophie Robertson gave a real cameo performance as the maid, Edna, however, even though her appearance on stage was very brief, she gave a nice naive performance, and her accent was consistent and worked well.

Finally, Paul Caira gave an excellent performance as The Inspector. As the real lynchpin of the piece, manipulating the characters around him to confess to their 'crimes', this was a powerful and well-placed performance, generally giving a rather dour inspector like character, then occasionally allowing stronger emotions to creep in. These touches of emotion added real drama to the various smaller scenes, and also helped to ensure that his true identity remained a mystery, something that gave the play real power, especially towards the end.

Directed by Mary Lowe, this was an excellent play, giving a pointed look at the false morals and concerns of what is, after all, a rather self-centred humanity, and all the aspects of the play together worked very well to balance the various emotions and characters. There was some very good placement of the cast around the stage, and all the moves were natural and worked well. There were a few moments when some cast members had their backs to the audience, and this was not always ideal, however, given the rather small stage, and the difficulty in staging the various scenes, this was an understandable compromise. As already mentioned, resisting any urge to try to explain the Inspector's character, leaving him as a mysterious figure, made for a very powerful play, and the end of the play in particular was very well judged indeed, sending a shiver down one's spine.

I would like to thank LADS for inviting me to come and see this play, and apologise for the slight delay in producing this report! I wish you every success in your next season, and hope you continue to be able to produce plays of such consistent high quality in the future; your attention to detail is very much appreciated, and adds immeasurably to the quality of your productions.

Jackie Mitchell
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