

Bartholomew Players  
Absent Friends by Alan Ayckbourn

Although this play was written in the 70's, its themes are relevant to modern day. Congratulations to the group for retaining the authenticity of the 70s in the set, which was superb, costumes and props.

The play revolves around the dysfunctional set of friends, who are gathered to cheer up one of the friends whose fiancée had recently drowned. The friend, Colin, who was surprisingly bright and overbearing was portrayed excellently by Nick Smith. Far from being grief-stricken he proceeded to set about telling the gathered company where they were going wrong. He was a good raconteur and completely insensitive to the feelings of the group.

The hostess, Diana, (*Louise Taney*) was an early day *Hyacinth Bouquet*, steering her way around the social gaffs of others. She had a delightful nervous laugh at the start, which disappeared as she got into her stride, dissolving into screaming hysteria at the complications that ensued. Evelyn, (*Alex Reid*) remained on the sidelines, pinching the cheese & pineapple at every opportunity, chewing gum and making mostly dry and effective mono-syllabic replies to the conversation. She maintained her 'Brummie' accent well throughout. This is in between dealing with the baby, Wayne, in the pram. Although not part of the main action she remained completely involved.

Marge, (*Elaine Leggett*), as we have never seen her before, was brilliant. Her comic timing was great and her responses to phone calls from her (unseen) over-weight, bedridden husband, Gordon was amazing. Always seeming to say the wrong thing to, or about, the grieving Colin.

Paul (*Ianto Wain*) played the embittered husband of Diana, well. Not really wanting to engage with the estranged friend, Colin. It emerged that Paul was having an affair with Evelyn, who is the wife of John (*Chris Carson*) a work colleague, who was diminutive and accepting of the situation. He was played very well, being crass, at times, but obeying orders from Evelyn, Paul and anyone else who barked at him.

The whole cast gelled well together and produced a polished and well-rounded performance.

Congratulations to all.

Nigel James