

A BUNCH OF AMATEURS by Ian Hislop and Nick Newman
17th May 2023

This play revolves around a struggling amdram group who are trying to save their Barn Theatre in Stratford. They bring in a guest star, a faded Hollywood actor, Jefferson Steele to play the lead in their production of King Lear, to bolster publicity and audience numbers. However, this Stratford was not the birthplace of the Bard, but a sleepy Suffolk village. Dorothy (Jo Burns) was well cast as the director plus a Lear cast member She was long-suffering and brimming with confidence trying to contain Jefferson. She was an excellent foil for him and the chemistry between them was good.

Nigel Dewbury (Nick Smith) was played confidently in his peevish approach to Jefferson as he felt that he should have had the part of Lear. This culminated in him passing the story to the national press regarding Jefferson's perceived dalliances with Lauren, wife of the sponsor. Although, as usual, he had the wrong end of the stick. Steel's 'affair'. This supposedly happened at the B&B run by cast member Mary Plunkett, (Louise Taney) who was infatuated with Jefferson yet transitioned delightfully from fixation to anger at his infidelity. The handyman and fellow cast member Dennis Dobbins (Ianto Wain) had an earthy simplicity and was expertly played, becoming Jefferson's minder. Full marks to him, for his performance, having had Covid all week. He also recovered well from a missing prop, like the trooper he is.

Gareth Hammond as Jefferson really looked the part and maintained his American accent convincingly throughout as he portrayed the clueless and demanding fading Hollywood star. He kept up the arrogance brilliantly, of the Hollywood aura, throughout. His drunken scene was beautifully executed. The whole cast gelled well together. The physio scene with Lauren (Claire Crowther) was excellent and she made a marvellous job of the part. Jessica, Jefferson's daughter was played well by youthful newcomer Seren Lemaire who also achieved an American accent. The use of the auditorium was good with effective use of flats and curtains. The appearance of the invalid motorised scooter through the auditorium was a masterpiece.

Although there were very many scenes and sub-scenes, which was a bit distracting, the crew managed the changes very well. The unaccompanied solo singing of folk songs between scenes was not easy, but was carried off well by those cast members who were cajoled into performing.

The lighting and effects were good and appropriate.

The play was greatly enjoyed by a full first night audience. Congratulations to joint directors, Joe O'Connor and Pip Burns.

Nigel James