National Operatic & Dramatic Association London Region

Society : Bartholomew Players

Production : Dangerous Corner

Date : 28th November 2018

Venue : Eynsham Village Hall

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Report by : Rob Bertwistle

 Show Report

Many thanks for the invitation to review the latest production from Bartholomew Players the J. B. Priestley classic thriller *Dangerous Corner.* This complex and wordy thriller was brought vividly to life by this fine ensemble cast with a very convincing set and period looking props and set dressing.

Once again Steve Ashcroft’s clever set design constructed and dressed by cast members and other members of the company demonstrated the Bartholomew Players commitment to putting on quality productions.

The Cast:

Gillian Somerscales gave an impressive performance as Freda Caplan with suitably clipped vowels and dispensing some wonderfully cutting remarks to fellow characters with aplomb. Gillian really captured the character well and used the stage to good effect. Looking very much the lady of the house Gillian’s delivery of her many caustic and comic lines was spot on.

Liz Hutchinson played the author and invited dinner guest Maud Mockridge with gleeful sarcasm relishing her lines in her all too short time on stage. She leaves the party at a fairly early moment only returning as the opening scene is replayed with a very different outcome. Liz projected well and her diction was good.

New comer Elaine Leggett gave an impressive performance as the seemingly meek and prim wife of Gordon, Betty Whitehouse. The revelations that are revealed as the plot unfolded saw Betty to be seen in a very different light. Elaine managed admirably to convey the two facets of the character’s persona. I did have a few missed lines when you were far up stage Elaine so remember to project but as the action developed your projection certainly was spot on!

Gordon the (un)happily married husband to Betty was played with splendid bluster and a hidden depth to the character by Ianto Wain. That hidden depth being Gordon’s feelings for the unseen and deceased Martin (whose assorted associations with the cast members’ forms the basis of the rather convoluted plot) while trying to maintain a happy relationship with Betty. The characters slow decent into intoxication with some beautifully acted outbursts in his defence of Martin made this a super characterisation from Ianto.

Olwen Peel was played very well Sara Miller. I really liked Sara’s measured delivery of her lines and the calm persona of the character. Only as the play progressed did we see Olwen taking centre stage and in fact having a very good grasp of the intricacies of the unfolding plot. I did feel that Olwen was rather too glamorously dressed for a supposedly dowdy ‘spinster’. The immaculate hair design and the long extravagant looking drop ear rings didn’t quite match the character but this certainly did not detract from a first class and riveting performance.

Gareth Hammond played the stuffy arrogant Charles Stanton with relish. This was a very well judged performance with clear diction and strong projection. Gareth used the stage well and developed a very believable characterisation.

Robert Caplan, husband to Freda, and at whose insistence that the truth should always be told no matter what the consequences was played effectively by Nick Smith. He captured the character to good effect and used the stage well interacting believably with the other characters. I did sense some awkward moments - possibly first night nerves although this in fact fitted quite well with the characters disposition. Just one small point. Try to use arm gestures a little less Nick. There was much gesturing to emphasise points in the dialogue which can become slightly irritating. However a very good interpretation and well done to all the cast members. There were some excellent portrayals.

Director:

Joe O’Connor often seen treading the boards in many recent productions for the Players donned the directors hat for this production and a very good job he made of it too. Joe had assembled a well-balanced cast some more experienced players and some newer actors but they all blended well into a fine ensemble cast each sparking off the other in some realistic and often unsettling exchanges. The dialogue rattled along at a cracking pace and cues were picked up quickly ensuring the narrative never faltered. The movement around the set was realistic and no one made an unnecessary move as far as I could discern. The cast coped well on the whole with the very wordy script with only a trace of opening night nerves creeping into some performances.

 Stage management:

Claire Crowther ensured the proceedings all flowed according to plan which they appeared to do. The one set production certainly makes life slightly easier for a busy stage manager!

Lighting:

The lighting design by Graham Diacon was spot on and gave atmosphere, perfectly complimenting the stage design and feel of the period. I was particularly impressed with the working on-stage wall lights – a nice touch of authenticity.

Make-up and Hair:

Hair by Sue Greenwood and make-up by Ellina Mikhailova and Beth Partlett was of a high standard in both areas perfectly complimenting the costumes and feel of the era – so important when the look of a production has to make the audience believe that they have been transported back in time.

Set Design:

Here was another fine set (typical of the Bartholomew Players) designed by Steve Ashcroft. The construction was solid with no noticeably obvious wobbly walls and the attention to period detail really captured the flavour of the 1930’s perfectly. There was plenty of space to allow the actors to move around without falling over each in the relatively small playing area. The set was dressed thoughtfully with many ‘period’ looking items of furniture and props. The one slightly jarring piece of set dressing was the not very convincing (electric) ‘fire’ made even more unrealistic when a cast member tried to burn something on it.

(Steve was also responsible for the relatively uncomplicated sound design as well as the programme so a very busy man indeed!)

Props:

The props list must have seemed quite daunting but Trisha Leopold certainly rose to the challenge with some fine examples of period ‘bits and bobs’. For example the crucial cigarette case was splendid but the period radio was certainly an eye-catching addition to the props list!

Costumes:

Judith Essery’s costumes were perfect for the setting and certainly invoked that 1930’s feel. I did feel that the character of Olwen was rather too ‘smart’ - sophisticated almost - and slightly at odds with the character in in terms of the character profile. However, the costumes looked splendid and the actors all wore and move in them very elegantly.

Programme:

The usual Bartholomew Players programme format works well and here was no exception. Good quality paper and printing and with Steve Ashcroft in the driving seat the content was informative and a good ‘pre-performance’ read. I do like the presentation of the cast and crew pages as ‘In the spotlight’ and ‘Behind the scenes’ – it sums up the many jobs and tasks very succinctly.

Front of House:

It is always a pleasure to visit the Players in their well-appointed and modern village hall setting and my welcome was warm and friendly as is always the case. Thank you everyone on Front of House duty.

Finally my thanks to all involved with this splendid and thought provoking production. It was good to see the Bartholomew Players on fine form. I look forward to seeing you all soon.

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