National Operatic & Dramatic Association London Region

Society : Bartholomew Players

Production : And Then There Were None

Date : 15th May 2019

Venue : Eynsham Village Hall

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Report by : Rob Bertwistle

 Show Report

Thank you for the kind invitation to review the latest production by the Bartholomew Players – the classic whodunit, *And Then There Were None,* from the Queen of Crime, Agatha Christie. This was a polished and well-presented production with many twists and turns keeping the attentive audience in suspense until the final few moments.

The well-rehearsed cast of some familiar and some new faces brought this complex and thought-provoking murder mystery to life with some excellent characterisations and good use of the playing area deftly directed by **Denise Santilli**.

After a minor technical hitch at the start we were soon drawn into the goings-on on Soldier Island as the bodies started to pile up.

The first few minutes were a little slow with the cast possibly slightly unnerved by first night jitters or maybe by the delayed start but soon the action was rattling along with good pace and the picking up of cues.

The Cast:

**Steve Ashcroft** gave a good performance as the stoical butler **Tom Rogers** played with suitable gravitas with good diction and stage presence ably supported by his rather hysterical and complaining wife **Ethel** played with relish by **Lesley Robinson**.

**Joe O’Connor** fresh from directing the last production played an unusually minor role only appearing briefly in the opening moments of the play as mysterious boatman **Fred Narracot**. Only reappearing again for the bows it was understandable that Joe along with **Kate O’Connor** was able to stage manage the production too.

I liked **Elaine Leggett** as the highly strung and nervy **Vera Claythorne**. Elaine captured the character well and the character built up well to the final tense moments of the play.

**Rory Phillips** almost stole the show as the flippant and flirty **Philip Lombard**. A nicely judged performance and a part which Rory obviously had great fun playing. He used the stage well and was a welcome antidote to the rising body count!

**Ed Miller** was convincing as the egotistical, smooth talking and fast driving **Anthony Marston**. He captured the character’s unpleasant personality very well and met a very well-played demise after drinking a glass of poisoned whiskey.

**Nick Smith** had fun and played the very wordy role of disgraced policeman **William Blore** with conviction. Nick always projects well and uses the playing area to good effect. A well-judged performance.

**Ianto Wain** delivered a strong portrayal of the rather sad and pathetic **General Mackenzie**. This was a performance with just the right amount of pathos and resignation to the approach of his impeding fate. Well done! The ‘ageing’ make-up looked very effective also.

I liked **Liz Hutchinson** as the bitter and acerbic Bible reading **Emily Brent**. What an unpleasant character beautifully brought to life. I was impressed with her death scene too. Liz managed to keep extremely still for a very long time before she was discovered ‘deceased’ as the action continued around her. Liz always has extremely clear diction and good projection. Some impressive stage knitting going on too!!

**Gareth Hammond** was perfectly cast as the over-bearing and ruthless retired judge, **Sir Lawrence** **Wargrave**. Gareth captured the character very well - with that air of authority and of being slightly unhinged brilliantly portrayed. The controlling aspect of the character tinged with a hint of sadism worked well as it was revealed the good Judge was indeed the perpetrator. I wasn’t too sure about the villainous final cackle though! Dare I say a well-judged performance?

Last but by no means least, to round off this excellent cast was **Rob Wondrak** who had a wonderful time as the seemingly confident but nervy and highly strung **Dr. Armstrong**. This was a strong performance as the character developed from bright and breezy chit chat to sudden and melodramatic outbursts as the character began to ‘unravel’ as the plot unfolded.

All the performances were strong and worthy of note and this is largely down to some excellent plotting and character development which the director, it would appear from the performances, must have spent some considerable time on. Congratulations to you all!

Director:

Director **Denise Santilli** had assembled a talented cast to deliver this intriguing mystery play and a fine job they made of it too. After a rather slow beginning the pace picked up and off we went. The entrances and exits were made effectively though at times the stage did seem a little crowded as character after character entered but the plotting ensured there were always interesting groups and the characters interacted well with each other. The movement around the stage looked mostly natural with just one or two awkward moments as the ‘guests’ arrived. The tension was built up beautifully with a very impressive finale. Many congratulations.

Lighting and Sound:

**Graham Diacon**’s clever lighting plot and **Claire Crowther**’s sound design both worked well adding atmosphere and tension to the drama. The lighting effect as a ‘candle’ was moved around the stage was very effective as was the ‘rain’ sound effect suddenly intensifying as the French doors on to the terrace opened and closed. Two quite small but none-the-less very clever effects all adding to the realism. Well done!

Make-up:

The make-up by **Ellina Mikhailova** and **Beth Partlett** looked perfectly in keeping with the style and the era of the production and was applied well.

Set Design:

**Steve Ashcroft**’s clever set design worked well in the relatively small playing area. The set conveyed the era and foreboding nature of the plot with a claustrophobic feeling of lack of space (although there was ample in reality). I liked the positioning and use of the various entrances and the very effective painted Devon coastal back drop complete with crashing waves and spray all looking very realistic. The ‘terrace’ running across the back of the stage was cleverly realised although did seem rather restricting when used as an entrance particularly as most of the cast entered laden with assorted items of travel baggage!

Props:

**Trish Leopold**’s impressive props list must have been quite a challenge to source. The disappearing figurines to name one. The cast all used the props with ease and the various items ranging from whiskey glasses to suitcases all looked in keeping with the era and setting of the play.

Costumes:

All the costumes supervised by **Judith Essery** and **Sally Firth** looked splendid and perfectly in keeping with the look and style of the production.

Programme:

The programme by **Steve Ashcroft** followed the familiar style of the Bartholomew Players programmes with the usual informative and interesting snippets about the production and the always entertaining cast biographies.

Front of House:

Thanks to the Front of House team for the usual warm welcome for me and my guest.

Finally a big thank you to everyone involved with the production. My guest and I had a thoroughly enjoyable and entertaining evening. I wish Bartholomew Players every success with their next production.

Best wishes

Rob

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