



ROSE BOWL ADJUDICATION

NAME OF COMPANY: Amateur Players Of Sherborne

NAME OF PRODUCTION: **Table Manners**

VENUE: Sherborne Studio Theatre

DATE: Wednesday 26th February 2020

ADJUDICATOR: Laura Corradi Loughran

Firstly, what a gorgeous venue. It was my first visit to the Sherborne Studio and it was the perfect place to put on this play, making the audience feel very much a part of the 'dinner table', with its intimate layout. Overall, this production was staged with a great understanding of farce and comic timing. The play itself is limited in its plot, however in depth in its characters and ill-matched relationships. Throughout, the pace never wavered, a testament to the direction and the cast. The characters were well established and identifiable. A treat!

STAGING

What was instantly clear, was the attention to detail in each cast members characterization and physicality within the staging, for example Sarah, walking around subtly checking for dust, plumping cushions and holding a general look of disapproval at any apt opportunity. Her avid sense of self-importance was of great contrast to Annie's, down trodden, compliant attitude. I especially enjoyed Sarah charging towards Annie with extreme busybody interest to hear about her personal plans, 'Of course I'll want to hear.'

Tom occupied a bumbling persona reminiscent of James Fleet's Hugo, from The Vicar of Dibley, which I very much enjoyed. His line delivery was spot on, not an easy feat

whilst tucking into a full tin of water biscuits. In contrast, Reg entered in an abundance of energy. His reaction to the news of Annie and Normans rendezvous was pure jollity. A highlight of the scene was the highly comical Reg and Sarah's argument. The audience started tittering amongst themselves laughing at the familiarity, further enhancing the intimate atmosphere of the venue. The carrot wine tasting sequence was excellent, as was the introduction to Norman, ending the scene with his confident and humorous singing backstage.

Into scene 2, Norman made a very good attempt to vary the sections of his monologue. I felt perhaps he could have played to Annie with more mock cruelty to enhance the speech. The staging and physical execution of the armchair slumping was superb. Ruth provided the coldhearted addition to the dysfunctional family group. Her career driven, hard faced demeanor shone through with terrific facial expression and stiff physicality, contrasting well to Norman petulant childlike behavior. A highlight of the scene was Ruth's reaction to Norman's affair, bursting into laughter at East Grinstead.

Act 2 brought Toms' awkwardness to the forefront with a well-directed boxing skit. The table organization debacle was staged and executed skillfully, taking into account the angle of the table and sightlines. Tom's 'back where I started' comment, then settling into the low seat was highly comical, further enhanced by his bewildered facial expression. When having a fairly static scene around a table, it is up to the actors to deliver enough interest to keep up the pace and avoid monotony, and your cast delivered. Highlights included Reg's joke telling and Normans ode to the lettuce leaf. I particularly enjoyed watching Normans interaction with Sarah, subtly manipulating her with his flirtatious advances, progressing into the final scene where we witness Sarah come around with almost girlish glee at his attention. The audience were fully invested in the action, and laughter rippled from each person sharing the joke of cleaning a house for a cleaner. Tom's display of OCD and singing 'All things bright and beautiful,' with the addition of the count to 4 into the second verse was excellent...detailed, realistic and an excellent end.

The play was an excellent choice for the venue, and was extremely well cast. I will note here that it was refreshing to hear every word with the execution of excellent diction from every cast member. If you tackle the rest of the trilogy, I'll be back. Congratulations on a fantastic production.

DESIGN

The theatre complimented the intimacy of the set and its rather shabby dining room. The props were well dated and there was a lived in comfortable feel to the stage dressing. I particularly liked the effort to dress the patio doors exit, with garden plants. The scene changes were swift and well executed. Using the same music for Act introductions and scene changes added warmth and a sense of familiarity which was charming. Lighting was natural and unobtrusive throughout. The simplistic lighting plot was sufficient for this type of production and enhanced the setting and action, rather than detracting from it. The costumes added to each character in style and colour choice, allowing an ease of physical movement.

CAST

Annie played by Jane Pitts

You captured her exhaustion in having to care for her elderly mother and need for escape from her mundane life. There was an authentic truth to your portrayal. Initially although appearing to be a bit of a pushover, your glimpses of anger towards Norman and frustration towards Tom was believable and identifiable. Good Work.

Sarah played by Bev Taylor-Wade

You played Sarah with a thoroughly entertaining air of snobbery, from each undermining glance down your nose, to the way you scrupulously re-arranged the knickknacks around the dining room. You used inflections of voice to great effect, for example the “you shouldn’t have bothered” lines. You also managed to capture her vulnerability and took us on a complete journey, allowing us to empathize with her underlying marital issues. Congratulations on a fine performance.

Tom played by Roger Chadbourne

Simply charming. You captured the dim witted personality of Tom, who although intelligent, has limited social skills. Although slow on the uptake to realise Annie’s affections, you seemed completely comfortable with the current arrangement enough to tuck into a whole tin of water biscuits without a second thought. Your physicalisation of the boxing skit and OCD ending was executed brilliantly, as was your slightly skittish demeanor throughout. Well Done.

Reg played by Richard Culham

You burst onto the stage with an abundance of energy. Nothing bothers Norman and you seemed to enjoy captivating us with his witty remarks and endless jokes. You utilized every moment of comedy that could be extracted from the script and delivered with a warm but cheeky delivery. Excellent.

Norman played by Cameron Thrower

A difficult role entering the family environment having to deliver a long monologue once the other characters have already been established. He cares only for himself and what he wants and you sauntered around the stage manipulating the others at any available opportunity. You portrayed Norman with an unpleasant and almost sickly suave, although you still made it difficult to dislike you. Good Work.

Ruth played by Rachael Alexander

Oh the vanity. You excelled in this hard faced, career driven wife, who obviously cared little about her husband, or anyone else for that matter. You physicalized Ruth with an air of sophistication, and jabbed all you can with energized brutality during each spoken line. Your reaction to Normans East Grinstead plans was excellent. A highly committed performance.

Thank you for your warm welcome and your hospitality and I look forward to many more performances at this theatre.