



Society : Quince Players
Production : Absent Friends
Date : 13th – 17th September 2016
Venue : Cordes Hall, Sunninghill
Report by : Susan Boobyer-Pickles

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Show Report

Absent Friends by Alan Ayckbourn was written and first produced in 1975 and this is the first dilemma that tasks any Director of Ayckbourn plays; to produce in the original play era or to update to current day. Many of his plays simply don't work in modern settings but Absent Friends has nothing in the plot that particularly demands the era and in fact as with many of Ayckbourn plays the subject matter and the dilemmas raised are as pertinent today as they were when he conceived them.

DIRECTOR (Jenny Hopper)

In this instance the Director decided to update to current day which is helpful in so many ways. Not only is it easier to create the setting and to dress the actors but I think it is more relevant to the audiences. The casting was very well done with an almost perfect matching of players to their characters in terms of age, although perhaps the casting of John was a little young, but at the end of the day amateur theatre demands flexibility in all areas. A well-directed play; all the players moved confidently around the set and looked comfortable in their character roles. A play that definitely highlighted strong female characters; nice to see.

DIANA (Siobán O'Connor)

A very well portrayed character showing us the distress and anger felt as she explores the suspected infidelity of her husband Paul, especially as she believes the woman concerned is a family friend and currently in her house! Siobán played the nervousness well and was clear in all her delivery. Multi-tasking on stage is something that comes with experience such as having a reason for moving a plate or another prop. The cream pouring incident was well handled with no hesitation or preamble to ensure the action was a surprise to the audience. The programme notes say that she has not been on stage for some time – hopefully this foray will not be the last.

EVELYN (Torja Lander)

This is a really hard part to play – on stage nearly the whole time with few words apart from monosyllabic responses to any questions asked to her. The big row was very well done and the revelation of the actual truth of her “affair” with Paul really set him to be the buffoon. The addition of the mobile phone was a good way to update the character and appeared completely natural within the play. Torja managed this extra prop with good expressions throughout.

MARGE (Allison Sharpe)

Clearly a very experienced actress; Allison played the part of Marge with masterful confidence and comedy. Nick-named “Buzy Bee” she flitted from one thing to another with effortless ease from one part of the stage to another and one conversation to another. Her management of the multiple props and bags was really well done and while fiddling with things can sometimes distract here we just got

the sense of who Marge is – friendly, loyal and generous in every way. Her cross examination of Evelyn was very well done and a particular highlight.

PAUL (Robin Newell)

Honestly he didn't stand a chance once Evelyn had dished the dirt and we were presented with a rather comedic, probably menopausal, stereotypical husband. He has everything on a plate and doesn't know when he is well off. The interplay between Robin and Siobán clearly showed their long standing relationship and the frustrations of both. The realisation about what Evelyn really thought of him was very amusing.

JOHN (Andrew Bowker)

The Andrew character is younger than the other male characters while still having a reasonably long history with Paul - it seemed he was aged up with hair white although I am not sure if this was necessary and made the apparent age difference between him and Evelyn a little stark. John played the overly sensitive and jittery John well and his reaction to the word "death" was very funny.

COLIN (Nick Teale)

Colin arrives at the party in his honour to cheer him up – but the chaos he arrives to only highlights his apparent happiness at having loved and lost rather than never loved at all. Nick played the role straight and never deviated from his character, unaware of any tension amongst his friends and unaware of their annoyance at his cheerful disposition – annoyingly happy but I liked him !

SET and PROPS

The stage was set as a modern Kitchen / Dining / Living room – a breakfast was on stage with the rest of the kitchen off stage. Props are often difficult to source and largely the effect worked.

CREW

SM Molly Matthews and the crew had a relatively relaxed role to play with no scene changes and mainly props coming on and off stage all of which seemed to appear at the right time.

LIGHTING and SOUND (Peter Fitzwater and Andy Curtis)

The stage area was well lit and all the voices were well heard. Sound effects were appropriate and well executed especially the mobile phone "pings" assuming these were effects and not done live from the phone.

COSTUMES and MAKE-UP (Dianne Gosden and Heather King)

All costume was appropriate for the character and the era. All make-up looked authentic under the lights.

A really enjoyable evening for Terry and I at our first Quince Players production. Thank you Jenny for taking the time to chat to us after the show we appreciated it. We look forward to seeing you all again at your Panto "Jack and the Beanstalk" in January.

Susan Boobyer-Pickles (and Terry Hunt)
Regional Representatives, London District 14