



Society : Quince Players  
Production : **A MURDER IS ANNOUNCED**  
Date : Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> September 2014  
Venue : Cordes Hall, Sunninghill  
Report by : Gordon Bird, NODA Representative, Area 14

## Report

I was delighted to be invited to watch Quince Players production of Agatha Christie classic, *A Murder is Announced*.

A murder is mysteriously announced in the local paper and of course when the invited guests gather, the murder duly takes place at the appointed hour, only, it is the alleged murderer who dies. Fortunately the villagers are fortunate that local busybody Miss Marple is around to help solve the case.

The director announced in the programme that this would be somewhat different production, and casting a male as Miss Marple could fall into that category. My personal view is that there are enough talented females within this group for someone to produce an accomplished performance of the heroine and would love to understand the reasoning behind the casting. Certainly casting males in leading female roles is not usual; I have seen many cases where Madam Arcati (in Noel Coward's *Blithe Spirit*) has been performed by a male performer without any detriment to the success of the production.

Quince Players production of this show was smoothly presented and the director kept his promise by ensuring the comedy was maintained at the appropriate moments whilst keeping faithful to the plot and the characters. As always, the set and the performances were of a high standard that one comes to expect from this talented group.

### **Julia Simmons (ALISON RAMSDEN)**

This was a nicely presented characterisation by Alison. The bickering between Julia and Patrick was very well presented, perfectly believable (even though later we find out that it was an act!)

### **Letitia Blackdock (ALLISON SHARPE)**

This was a wonderfully portrayed character. Allison's movement, stance and line delivery were perfect for the period, showing good understanding of the part.

### **Dora Bunner (ANNE KEEN)**

Anne produces a convincing characterisation of the part that is affectionately known by her friends as "bunny". She keeps the pace going, revealing important facts about the case, before succumbing to the murderer second victim. I was impressed how Anne covered her tickly cough by asking for a glass of water – remaining in character throughout, without disrupting the scene or drawing attention away from the action.

### **Patrick Simmons (TOBY ADAMSON)**

Good characterisation by Toby who emphasised his character with the folding of his arms – which worked a treat. Good pace and delivery ensured that all his lines were heard.

**Mitzi (PIP TONKINS)**

Wonderful opening entrance, almost exploding into the room! Her eccentric “East European” temperament was a lovely contrast to the other characters on stage. Pip’s accent was heavy, but sufficiently delivered so that it could be understood.

**Miss Marple (HUW MORDECAI)**

Huw is no stranger to performing Agatha Christie characters, having performed Hercule Poirot in *Black Coffee* a couple of years ago. As Miss Marple he performed the role sensitively, showing an understanding of her character. We could see her trying to work out the problem – deliberating who the murderer is, and considering the motive. Huw’s interpretation worked and looked comfortable as the local spinster. His knitting did need a little more practise, but for one not familiar with that skill, it was a fair attempt!

**Phillipa Haymes (ANNE ROBINSON)**

This is the first time I have seen Anne perform and have to say she gave an accomplished performance as Phillipa, or “Pip” as it is later revealed. She clearly had a good understanding of character as it was very well portrayed. One of the strengths I notice of this society is that they do speak out so that everyone hears. Anne is no exception and noticed a good volume and fine intonation.

**Mrs Swettenham (VIVIENNE FENTON)**

Vivienne gave a good interpretation as a mother doting on her son. A nice character that was different from the other characters. Her relationship with her son was very well presented, adding to the list of possible suspects.

**Edmund Swettenham (ALISDAIR CLENNAN)**

Edmund is a lovely character to play – as you are never sure if he is good or bad. Alisdair handled this very well and kept the audience guessing throughout. I struggled to hear Alisdair at times, so be careful about dropping your volume and try to keep a consistent level. Overall, this was a nicely presented and performed character.

**Rudi Scherz (GORDON COE)**

Rudi is a small role, as he is the murdered victim, but is essential to the plot. For the short time he was on, this was nicely presented.

**Inspector Craddock (QUILLER REES)**

Quiller produces a good understanding of the inspector and cleverly avoided the trap of playing the stereo typical role. He showed good authority on stage, established by a good opening scene (I liked the idea of having you on the floor where the body laid and the jumping up). Good clear volume with the right intonation – a very good performance.

**Sergeant Mellors (GORDON COE)**

Gordon portrayed a nice foil to the inspector. Gordon always produces a good performance and this role was no exception. A good performance.

**Director (KEN LONG)**

I liked the choice of music for the opening, Saint Saens's *Dance Macabre* (that was featured in the popular television programme *Jonathan Creek*). It gave it a sense of foreboding, creating the right mood for the start of the play. The movement all looked very natural, which is a huge compliment to manage everyone on stage to move to the spot at the right time, whilst keeping in character yet keeping the pace flowing. There were several lovely nicely "framed pictures" that were set. On the whole, the volume was very good and I heard all the dialogue from the cast.

**Technical Director (PETER FITZWATER)**

The sound and lighting design looked very good. I liked the use of wall lights and occasional lamps that added warmth to the scenes, and added interest to the set.

**Stage Manager (KATHRYN HARRIS)**

The stage was very capably managed by Kathryn and her team – all stage properties were in place and scene changes were executed promptly. There was a long change between scenes 1 and 2 (I should imagine because of a quick costume change) but this was covered well with incidental music.

**Backstage Crew & Properties (JANET CURTIS & CLAIRE PRATT)**

I liked the detail to the props – for example the telephone being in period. This set was perfectly and appropriately dressed for the period.

**Lighting & Sound (ANDY CURTIS)**

The sound and lighting effects were executed on cue. The gunshot, which was a "live" sound effect, was perfectly executed and gave the right level.

**Wardrobe Mistress (DIANE GOSDEN)**

Performing period pieces is always a challenge for any society, probably more so for amateur societies, yet these costumes looked great – perfectly in period and looked clean and well pressed.

**Set**

The show started with the red tabs in but revealing two chairs in front, one down stage right and one down stage left. Once the tabs opened, it revealed a well furnished and decorated set of creams and browns, appropriate to the location and period. All of the furniture was very well positioned and used. I liked the use of rugs and carpets that added texture to the stage.

**Programme**

Once again an excellent programme with good use of colour, graphics and some of the best quality photos I have witnessed. The biographies were interesting and the programme contained all the required information that is needed.

**Front of House**

A well staffed front of house that was warm and friendly.

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Thank you Quince Players for providing me an enjoyable afternoon watching a well rehearsed performance of this well known play.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'G. Bird'.

**Gordon Bird**  
***NODA representative***  
***London Region, District 14***