



Society : Quince Players  
Production : Spider's Web  
Date : Sat 18<sup>th</sup> May 2019  
Venue : Cordes Hall, Sunninghill  
Report by : Terry Hunt

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## Show Report

Many thanks for the invitation to report on Quince's production of Spider's Web. One thing which strikes me about Quince as a group is that the entertainment of the audience is taken seriously, rather than 'entertaining' the cast. Staging any kind of production these days can be fraught with all sorts of health and safety issues, ever increasing costs and the more transient nature of performers, so it's a pleasure to see a quality production, staged with community spirit, by a group that appears to have real heart.

The ambience which surrounds a Quince production is warming, even before the curtain 'rises'.

For a relatively small stage, creating a drawing room which appears spacious enough to belong to a property sounding as grandiose as Coplestone Court, with the various entrances and exits required, was nicely achieved by Andrew Bowker and Colin Keating. The room certainly had the feel of a space in modest sized country manor. Not being 'modern' 50's in its style and therefore most certainly pre-war in its construction, adding a picture rail with white (or a light grey) taken to the top of the flats, would have added height and made it feel even more spacious. Also, until more recent trends, a dado was supposed to be placed from the floor, 1/5 up the wall from the overall height of the room...suggesting the Coplestone Court drawing room was much higher than we could see (Yes, I am nit picking!)

All that said, in the absence of a boarder (or 'Header') to mask the view up to the ceiling above the stage, perhaps black at the top of the flats worked better in this case, to draw the eye away from the roof space. Ideally, though, a Border would have been in place.

Having backing flats or set dressing, on the off stage side of doorways was a welcome sight, helping to give the appearance of a solid building and offers some authenticity to the concept of going off out of the room, in to other spaces.

Overall the set appeared solid when doors were open/closed and the secret doorway worked very well.

As far as dressing, fittings and furniture is concerned, the staging didn't shout any particular time period, but somehow, that was rather fitting for a post war, rented, country home. I appreciated the hint of a few antiques mixed with more 40's/50's contemporary styling, none of which made a statement. I am aware of the effort Linda Humphrey made to her props department. Such accuracy is to me admired and is more likely to make a subliminal difference to the overall 'look' of the show...but it DOES make a difference. When things are correct, individual props or pieces of set dressing won't necessarily stand out, but they help to create the right, overall 'picture', so well done to Linda.

In finding authentic articles from the right era ( such as a 1953 edition of Who's Who), those items would have been, and looked, new in 1953. 60+ years later, those same items may be well used and worn and not look right for the time, so not always the best option. This WASN'T an issue which I was aware of in Spiders Web, just a note of caution, perhaps, that something which looks right MAY be better than the genuine article.

The layout of the stage worked well. All furniture was well positioned to be used effectively rather than being just décor, or obstacles

There were few demands on Lee Underwood's lighting, but in essence, the fundamentals of LX were met. The cast and set were well lit, with no undue shadows or dark areas and all cues appeared to be timely. Accepting interior light would have shone through the French windows, the lighting for the exterior could have had more of a night-time feel about it, but other than that, all was good. The wall lights were nice feature.

There is no particular credit for SFX, but again, there were few demands on the sound department, but even so, there were no sound issues in terms of quality or volume. I wasn't so sure about the choice of Que Sera Sera as a curtain raiser. Maybe just a personal thing, but it perhaps it was the use of an American song (from 1956!) for something which is very British. It just didn't sit right with me!

Under the nicely considered direction of Alison Sharpe, the performance had a strong, steady pace and a high level of stagecraft, with good use being made of the space and movement flowing nicely. Furniture (and the floor) was used well and naturally, giving differing levels. I was especially impressed by the confidence in line delivery from everyone. Even if there were mistakes, none were evident, the pick up rate from everyone was excellent with no hesitation, that I noticed, during the entire performance. Knowing your lines well is the most fundamental ask of any actor...so well done to everyone for that!!!

With some splendidly appropriate, distinctive costumes (Dianne Gosden), hair and make- up, (Heather King) there were some wonderful characterisations.

Tracey Corbett gave an impressively accomplished portrayal of Clarissa Hailsham- Brown. Not a small role!! Tracey is very watchable because she appears so comfortable on stage, with the periodic, humorous, well timed glances at the audience, and applying subtle nuances to her delivery, depending which character she is interacting with. If one had to analyse the relationship between 'Clarissa' and 'Henry Hailsham-Brown' (George McGavin), you could understand their attraction to each other possibly being her light and slightly playful character being the antithesis of his more grounded, serious, slower paced character. It was a believable marriage, with differences in the emotional connection with Pippa Hailsham-Brown (Sadie Nuttall) being daughter and step-daughter.

Sadie pitched her performance just about right in being (almost) a seen and not heard unless spoken to, child, through to an uncontrollably hysterical one. I very much liked the moments when Pippa was just 'there', quietly amusing herself. Well done for keeping a Pippa introspectively occupied, while actually remaining aware of the performance on stage. Sometimes, doing very little on stage can be harder to do well, than when at the centre of the action.

Hugo Birch (Andrew Darling), Jeremy Warrender (Toby Adamson) and Sir Rowland Delahaye, looking splendidly aristocratic in his yellow waistcoat and matching bow tie, made for an interesting collection of visitors. At first, I wasn't sure about Andrew's booming delivery, thinking it should have been toned down, however, as Hugo got increasingly intoxicated (which wasn't overplayed), I warmed to the character and thought ' Why not? Some people do talk too loudly". Ultimately, I enjoyed his amusingly blustering ways.

Jeremy was almost the opposite, being fairly unassuming, it would seem, and appeared to spend the entire performance eating sandwiches. It made me smile, every time I looked, there he was chomping

on another, though I'm sure it wasn't THAT many! I didn't feel that Jeremy's fascination/interest in Clarissa, came across, but it was a confident performance nonetheless. The chemistry between the two characters was very 'real'.

Sir Rowland appeared to have the troubles of the world on his shoulders. He came across as sincere, but not terribly commanding, given his position. Maybe a little more attack in the performance would have helped?

Melanie Trapnell, as the busybody gardener, Miss Peake, transitioned very nicely into Mrs Brown, with both sides of the character suitably eccentric, in different ways. It was extremely nicely played in that Mrs Brown and Miss Peake were clearly the same person, with one being an 'act'. ie. Melanie playing a character taking on another persona. I particularly enjoyed the intonation in Melanie's characterful delivery. A very solid performance.

Another excellent performance was from Simon Shaw as the creepy Oliver Costello who wouldn't have looked out of place in the Adam's family!! An amusing caricature throughout, from Simon's lithe appearance and gait, through to the waxy complexion, greased back hair, fidgety disposition and elucidative expressions, Simon brought a whole new dynamic to the production. The head wound and blood was achieved cleverly and very effectively, and I mean it as a compliment when I write that Simon was just as entertaining as a corpse!

Chris Duffy was both calm and commanding in his delivery as Inspector Lord. The overall performance was strong, very natural, and confident, however I do feel some comedic opportunities were lost because of it. Intentional or not, the 'Inspector Colombo' styling felt a little uninteresting! I did enjoy Chris's performance very much, I just felt that Chris was perfectly capable of giving Inspector Lord more character.

With good additional support from Anne Robinson as Mrs Elgin, Oliver Nursey as Constable Jones and Heather King as the Divisional Surgeon (and applause for Fiona Barker for taking on the role of Understudy for Clarissa), this was a strongly cast production with some first rate performances and high in production values. By any standards, Spider's Web was a good quality production making for an extremely enjoyable evening.

Terry Hunt