



Society : Quince Players
Production : **BLACK COFFEE**
Date : Saturday 15th September 2012
Venue : Cordes Hall, Sunninghill
Report by : Gordon Bird, NODA Representative, Area 14

Report

I was pleased to be invited by Quince Players to see Agatha Christie's play, *Black Coffee*, on Saturday 15th September, the anniversary of Agatha Christie's birthday.

Black coffee was Agatha Christie's first stage play, being produced in 1930 and transferred to a novel many years later. The play ran in London for several months and unlike many of her plays, surprisingly did not transfer to the America stage.

Agatha Christie always seems to conjure up a feel from a different era. And that feeling was helped with what was once the traditional singing of the national anthem at the beginning of the show.

ANNE ROBINSON (Mrs Tredwell)

As the housekeeper to Sir Claud Amoy, Anne performed a sustained and believable character. Throughout her inflection and diction was superb. A good performance.

REBECCA WIRE (Lucia Amoy)

This was a very convincing performance from Rebecca as Lucia, a character providing enough red herrings to keep the audience guessing to the end. Rebecca has very expressive eyes, and used these to good effect when reacting to others on stage. Her volume was excellent and I heard every word. Well done.

RHODA ROE (Miss Caroline Amoy)

What a lovely character and Rhoda made most of the comedy offered by some very well pointed lines to optimise the opportunity. She always looked in control of the scenes, even when it appeared when the lines were not quite flowing. This requires excellent concentration and experience – to keep in character and ensure the facts are revealed to the audience, whilst remaining true to the role. Well done on a wonderful character performance.

JOHN PAUL CURD (Richard Amoy)

Richard provided a typical son-in-heir character – again offering us some clues and motives for the murder. There were some lovely moments, especially at the end when the truth was emerging, and this was played with sincerity. I first felt that at times John Paul was a little starch in his performance, but I could easily understand if that was the characterisation for the role as Richard.

MOLLY MATTHEWS (Barbara Amoy)

Understood the character very well, and performed this role very comfortably. Certainly a contrast to when I last saw Molly in the panto earlier in the year. Her first entrance was wonderfully timed and produced a good dramatic reaction from the audience. Her accent and character was wonderfully maintained throughout the performance. Well done.

SIMON SHAW (Edward Rayner)

Simon performed a wonderful characterisation as Sir Claud's secretary. One instinctively wondered if he had something to do with the missing plans and then the murder. The character was maintained throughout the production – well done.

RORY O CONNOR (Dr Carelli)

What a wonderful creepy part! Again a very typical character as a suspicious “foreigner” and Rory ensured that his oily persona was sustained in all of his scenes. Rory has a wonderful way of providing good pace to his lines, ensuring that every word could be heard and delivered his lines with good weighted emphasis.

STEVEN SMITH (Sir Claud Amory)

Steven was very convincing as Sir Claud Amory – looking very much head of the household. He produced a good character and ensured we had enough clues to his relationships with his family and work colleagues as to why anyone would want to hurt him. Steven had good clear diction and volume and established his character very early and continued successfully throughout.

HUW MORDECAI (Hercule Poirot)

It may be quite surprising that I have never seen a Hercule Poirot film or TV episode (apologies to David Suchet), so my review is based on my memories of remembering the character from the books and from Huw's interpretation. And as it happens, I considered Huw's interpretation an excellent one. His accent was superbly controlled – enough of an accent so that we could gather his origins, but not so thickly applied that it distorted his words. I understood every word. Added to this, Huw displayed some wonderful gestures and mannerisms that enhanced his excellent eccentric characterisation. This was a truly an excellent and memorable performance.

GORDON COE (Captain Arthur Hastings)

As mentioned earlier, I had not seen any TV or film adaptations so I was impressed with Gordon's interpretation of the character of Hastings. Gordon mentioned in the programme that he tried to cover his native accent – and it is a compliment to report that I did not realise this until afterwards when I read the details in the programme. Gordon developed the character nicely so that we appreciated his awkwardness in the later scenes. There were some lovely reactions to what was going on stage, particularly with Barbara.

FIONA BARKER (Dr Graham)

A very efficient looking Doctor was ably performed by Fiona. She looked, sounded and portrayed a good characterisation of the local medical practitioner. Her accent and character were well maintained throughout the production.

ROBIN NEWELL (Inspector Japp)

This was a lovely characterisation as the Police Inspector. Robin offered a good variation to the other characters. His physical appearance, aided by costume, stance and accent ensured that we immediately identified his role. Robin also offered good line delivery and knew where to emphasis his lines. Well done on a good character interpretation.

BEN PERKINS (PC Johnson), TOBY ADAMSON (PC Dixon)

Small, non speaking parts, these roles were realistically performed by Toby and Ben. My wife, who works for her majesties Police force, informs me that they should have taken their hats off when indoors. Who am I to argue?

Director (ALISON SHARPE)

Assistant Director (JENNY BROWN)

I was impressed that all of the characters were clearly defined, understood and maintained. This helps when you have good actors and actresses but Alison and Jenny should be congratulated in ensuring that this was moved from the rehearsal process and into production. There were some moments when the setting introduced some challenging blocking issues. One, when Poirot was interviewing Barbara, when he had his back to the audience. This could have easily been resolved by him sitting in a different chair. I so wanted to see Poirot's expression to what he was hearing! From my seat a lot of the action up stage was equally blocked by the furniture down stage left.

There were some wonderful relationships between the characters, especially the development between Hastings and Barbara. I also particularly enjoyed the scene with the knitting in Act 2 scene 2, producing some good comic moments.

Overall I felt that this production was assuredly directed as the cast knew what they were doing, had a clear understanding of their character and what they were meant to perform.

Stage Manager (GEMMA SWAISLAND)

Overall the stage was managed smoothly by Gemma and her backstage team. There was quite a long pause between Act 1 scenes 1 and 2 – obviously allowing time for a costume changes. The pause was covered by background music but I did feel the audience was kept waiting a little too long.

Backstage Crew & Properties (ALISDAIR CLENNAN, BRENT WHITTED, BEN PERKINS, TOBY ADAMSON & MELANIE TRAPNELL)

All of the offstage sound effects were delivered efficiently. The lighting looked well designed, with the set and cast were well lit with no obvious shadows or dark patches.

On the whole the properties were in period of the 1930s but did feel the notebooks a little too modern.

Set

A very well dressed set that looked solid in its construction, and very much keeping within the period. I was pleased to see that even though there were lots of chairs on stage, they were all used. I did feel that some of positioning restrained the directions as in some cases we had characters with their back to audience, meaning that we could not see their faces or facial reactions.

I noted that Act 1 scene 1 was set at 8.30pm at night, and would have thought that the curtains would have been drawn? It was a shame they were not as they looked excellent!

Wardrobe Mistress (DIANE GOSDEN)

Wardrobe Assistant (HEATHER KING)

An excellent job was done on the costumes, offering a good sense of period.

Hairdressing, wigdressing & makeup (JENNY BROWN, LINDA PEACOCK, JULIAN SHARPE & GEMMA SWAISLAND)

I was not aware that anyone was wearing wigs or makeup so my sincere compliments to all involved as they clearly were very well thought out, fitted and believable. The hair (particularly the women) had been researched and looked suitable to the period.

Programme

This 20 page glossy colour programme was of excellent quality and value. It contained detailed interesting biographies of the cast. Given the title of the play relates to coffee, I liked the idea that everyone listed their favourite coffee. I would suggest that group look up the rules for best programme competition that is run by NODA to see if this quality programme qualifies, as it is certainly one of the best I have seen.

Front of House

The front of house team were once again very welcoming without being too intrusive, making our evening very enjoyable.

Black coffee is not one of Agatha Christie's well known plays, but this was a very enjoyable production. I was particularly impressed with the characterisations portrayed. My wife and I enjoyed our evening and guessed many possible solutions to the crimes except the correct one! I look forward to Quince Players next production, their season pantomime.

Gordon Bird

NODA representative

London Region, District 14