



Society : Quince Players  
Production : **THE ACCUSED**  
Date : Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> May 2013  
Venue : Cordes Hall, Sunninghill  
Report by : Gordon Bird, NODA Representative, Area 14

## Report

I have never been on a jury. Not even visited a court. That was, until Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> May when I was invited to Quince Players' production of Jeffery Archer's *The Accused*.

This play is set in a courtroom with us, the audience, asked to be the jury and are invited to deliver a guilty or not guilty decision at the end of the evening.

The script is exceptionally wordy and credit has to be given to the cast and particularly to the two barristers for their commitment and concentration. I enjoyed the fact they hesitated or repeated lines, checked their notes or their colleagues before continuing. Whether this was due to hesitancy of lines or part of the script, it added realism and a sense of immediacy to the performance and dramatic tension to the scenes that worked superbly.

### **Court**

#### **Jury Bailiff (GORDON COE)**

Gordon performed a wonderfully relaxed portrayal of the jury bailiff, advising the jury of the court proceedings that as used as a useful device to fill in the gaps that could not be revealed elsewhere in the script. Gordon never left his character and even mingled with the jury (sorry, audience) during the two intervals, continuing his official functions. He portrayed a clear friendly manner that was perfect for this role.

#### **Anthea Kersley QC (TRACY WARREN)**

This was a wonderful performance by Tracy as the prosecuting barrister. She dominated the stage and interacted very well with her colleagues - wonderful comic banter with the Sir James but professional when questioning her witnesses. The best moment however, was when she was cross-examining the accused. Her pace and intonation of line delivery was excellent, clearly thinking through the weight of the lines for maximum effect. A superb performance.

#### **Sir James Barrington QC (MARK HOLLIDAY)**

Mark performed a marvellous characterisation of Sir James, capturing perfectly the image of every court room barrister that we have seen on TV (for example Leo McKern's *Rumpole of the Bailey*, John Thaw's *Kavanagh QC*). The pulling at the robes when beginning his questioning has been seen many times before, but it felt absolutely right for Sir James's character, taking his "stage" and "performing" to his "audience". Mark has wonderful intonation, emphasising perfectly the right words, and weighting carefully his lines, producing excellent delivery on a very wordy play. His quirky, eccentric personality was there but never overplayed but added enough to make this an interesting and engaging performance.

**Margaret Jarvis (MOLLY MATTHEWS)**

**Alastair Ashton (PAUL SWEENEY)**

I was very impressed by the performances of **MOLLY** and **PAUL**. It is not easy to be on stage for the entire show with only a handful of lines. It requires tremendous concentration to give the illusion of hearing the facts revealed for the first time. They both gave superb performances of concentration, never losing the character, acting the entire time, reacting to the court proceedings perfectly and making discrete asides to the barristers as and when needed in keeping with their roles. They never sought to “grab the limelight” but they shone all the same with the immaculate portrayals. The stumble by Paul coming onto stage at the beginning was an accident, I assume, because it clearly had no relevance to his character or the plot so well done for so covering up the slip making it look very natural.

**Mrs Justice Cartwright (ALLISON SHARPE)**

Allison had the difficult role of playing the judge of the court. Difficult because she was centre stage, in full view of the audience the entire time, with a few intermittent lines that required concentration to interject on cue. This role is also very static with no opportunity to move, but Allison managed to work with these restrictions to produce a believable character performance. Being at the back of the stage she needed to project all her lines and did so perfectly, as I heard every word.

**Court Usher (GEMMA SWAISLAND)**

Completing the court, Gemma confidently entered the stage as the court usher, ensuring the “jury” stood for the judge and efficiently conveying the key evidence items. We heard every word owing to Gemma’s clear diction and volume.

***The Witnesses***

**DCI Payne (RORY O’CONNOR)**

Rory started the evening’s entertainment by coming into the auditorium and arresting the accused who was part of the audience, adding a sense of dramatic reality. When called to the stand, Rory offered a convincing role of the Detective Chief Inspector. His mannerisms were appropriate – unemotional, factual, referring to his notebook when required. (A point noticed by my other half who works for the police, he should have referred to the statement and not his notebook when called as a witness). Rory’s delivery was sometimes hard to hear but overall a good, solid performance.

**Albert Webster (SIMON HURRY)**

Mr Webster is ex-military and illiterate. I am not sure what the exact character description is but this was what Simon presented – from the moment he “marched” onto stage, wearing a suit, for what looked like the first time in his life, and a wonderful over familiar manner with the court, inviting reprimands from the judge. It was a lovely, enjoyable characterisation.

**Masood Hussein (STEVE SMITH)**

Steve has a good clear voice, easy to hear every line. His delivery is perfectly weighted, especially his line about being “too honest”. This was a lovely little character part that was very well performed.

**Professor Alice Forsyth (JULIE VOICE)**

Like the other witnesses that were called to stage, we heard the character appearing before they arrived on stage as they walked up through the audience. This enables the character to be set – and

Julie's interpretation of Professor Forsyth, the expert witness, was wonderfully performed. A breathy, fast pace delivery of lines with a hint of superiority, instantly gave her character interest.

**Jennifer Mitchell (SOPHIE SPENCER)**

This was a wonderful performance by Sophie as the key witness for the prosecution. From her entrance and her first few nervously played moments in the witness stand, we were delivered a fabulous performance. This actress has lovely perfect intonation and uses it with excellent effect. A lovely cameo role.

***The Accused***

**Patrick Sherwood (LEE UNDERWOOD)**

For the majority of the show, Lee had to sit in the dock speechless and had to wait until the final act before he had a chance to speak. But during the first two acts he sat and acted the part – reacting to what was being said, interacting with his council, and effectively injecting when Ms Mitchell was giving her evidence. When he finally did speak, he was clear and audible, keeping good pitch and volume. His character never waivered - helping the audience/jury to reach their verdict. Following the verdict, the change of character was successfully portrayed, showing a good, convincing contrast.

**Director (SARAH MATTHEWS)**

This is a difficult play to direct. Movement is restricted because of the court setting and there are large chunks of lines to be learnt by the main characters. Overall these hurdles were dealt with effectively by Sarah and her team. I was not sure if the two barristers were struggling for words or if it was part of the act, either way it was exceptionally effective when they checked their notes, spoke to their colleagues for affirmation. As I mentioned in my introduction, this added reality to the proceedings and allowed the emphasis of the point or question to be strengthened. There were a few blocking issues when the judge was speaking and I could not always see her as she was blocked by prosecuting council. This could have been avoided with her sitting down until the judge had finished her line, but this is a small note and did not impend on my enjoyment of the show. Exits and entrances were clearly defined, executed with good pace. I like the use of the central aisle to introduce the witnesses.

**Technical Director (PETER FITZWATER)**

The sound and lighting for this show were well designed and perfectly delivered. The lighting was perfectly placed, with no unwanted shadows cast and all the performers suitably lit.

**Stage Manager (GEMMA SWAISLAND)**

Gemma' dual role as court usher and stage manager were very well fused, as she ran the stage with extreme efficiency. I did think too efficient in some cases, with the entrance of the piece of evidence coming to court very quickly indeed. This did allow for the production to continue with good pace.

**Backstage Crew & Properties**

The properties were appropriate for the period of this show.

**Sound (CHRIS EVA)**

There were few sound effects for this show but when required they were delivered on cue.

**Wardrobe Mistress (DIANE GOSDEN)**

**Wardrobe Assistant and Makeup (HEATHER KING)**

The wigs and silks were all sufficient to the courtroom. I would question the patterned top worn by Margaret Jarvis. If it was deliberately worn to set a character then this should have been only at the beginning of the act and then asked to be “covered up” by Sir James. I felt this was a distraction and kept wondering what was the significance of the top – only there did not appear to be any.

Costumes for the witnesses were all appropriate to their characters, particularly the professor.

**Set**

The set consisted of a painted panelled dock, witness stand, and benches. From first view, it was evident where the play is set.

**Programme**

The front of the programme was set out as a newspaper headline in “The Gazette”, keeping to the theme of the show of us, the audience, being involved in the case. The twenty page programme was, once again, superbly produced. Sufficient space was given to each cast member’s biography and photograph, allowing good clarity to the pictures. I did enjoy the short one line admissions from the cast of what crimes they would commit.

**Front of House**

As always, the front of house team worked efficiently and welcomed my wife and I with the usual warmth that we come to expect. The well stocked bar offered a refreshing choice which we gratefully used during both intervals. At the bar, I enjoyed the newspaper articles about the case, keeping the theme of the show going throughout the theatre. With the court bailiff ushering us back into the “court”, we were kept in the mood of the piece. A nice touch that definitely worked.

I thoroughly enjoyed Quince Player’s production of *The Accused* and look forward to their next show, Alan Bennett’s classic comedy, *Habeas Corpus*, in September.



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