



Society : LADS
Production : Benefactors
Date : 16/3/13
Venue : Lopping Hall
Report by : Jackie Mitchell

Report

An interesting play, with action set in the 1960s, interspersed with character narrative from the 1980s, *Benefactors* is based on the dynamics of two very different couples, and how their interactions with each other influence the course of their lives, and the potential development of an old housing area into a new one.

Staged in the round, the set was rather minimal, with furniture being used to create the main scene of the kitchen, and lighting used effectively together with the ability of the performers themselves to create the other scenes. The main set was still full of nice touches however, such as the plant stand, paintings and items in the large wooden cabinet. The slow build up of the box files along the top of the cabinet was also a nice idea, emphasising the progression of the play, and the building project.

Lighting was very well used throughout the play, with pools of light being used to highlight the speakers from the 1980s, creating a clear distinction between these moments, and the main action of the play. There were a few occasions when the performer was not completely in the light when they started their speech, but in the main, they fixed this issue rapidly.

Costuming in the show was good, with the outfits worn by the cast seeming appropriate for the late 1960s, and also suiting the characters, and nice attention paid to details such as appropriate footwear. The change of outfits of the two men emphasised the change in their lives and attitudes between the two halves of the play, particularly the more rough clothing worn by Colin. It did seem a bit of a shame that the women did not also change costumes, particularly Sheila, given the progression of her character, however, this did not significantly impact on the production and is a very minor comment.

Dramatically the show, directed by Andrew Rogers, was generally well staged with good pacing. Given the in the round nature of the piece, there were moments when the performer speaking was obscured from at least some of the audience, usually when all four actors were delivering monologues from the 1980s era. This was not ideal, as it would have been nice to see their faces and emotions, but their dialogue was always audible and for the most part the players were moved around to minimise this. The space was intelligently used, and despite the limited set and relatively small performance area it was always easy to distinguish between the different environments. The staging of the play also allowed for a very intimate relationship between the performers and the audience, which enhanced some of the emotions portrayed by the characters.

With a cast of only four, the performers all worked well together to produce a slick and fast moving play with no weak links. Tom Donoghue was very plausible as the architect David, and the progression of his character from idealist to someone just trying to get the job done was very natural seeming. His relationship with the other performers was very natural, and he and Sophie Robertson, as his wife Jane, had a convincing relationship, managing to portray the ups and downs of a real marriage.

Sophie also did a good job as Jane. Her dialogue was very natural sounding, and her interactions with both Colin and David were nicely balanced, and her ambivalent feelings towards Colin towards the end of the play were perfectly judged.

As the antagonist of the play, Colin, Jon Gilbert was perfectly suited to the role. He gave a good aggressive performance as the at times unpleasant man, and his sudden burst of anger, and frankly irrational behaviour in the second act was very convincing.

As his wife, Sheila, Roz Gerrie was excellent. Her initial quiet as a mouse and under the thumb characterisation was completely convincing, and both her dialogue and physical performance matched completely throughout the play. The growth of Sheila, and her increasing infatuation with David was completely convincing, and her interaction with the rest of the characters was authentic and in many ways the glue that held the play together.

Overall, this was a good production of an interesting play, and generally up to the high standards I have come to expect from a LADS production. I would like to congratulate you on another fine production, and hope there will be many more in the future.

Regional Representative
NODA London District 6