



Society : Loughton Amateur Dramatic Society
Production : Whipping It Up
Date : 23rd January 2016
Venue : Lopping Hall
Report by : Jacquie Stedman

Show Report

I was very pleased to be cover for your Regional Rep, Andrew Rogers and be invited to come along to your recent production to provide a report for your Society. I always feel a trip to LADS is very stimulating – you always give your audience a lot to think about as well as providing a very good evening’s entertainment.

This play is in much the same vein as ‘Yes Minister’ which enjoyed such popularity during Mrs Thatcher’s Conservative Government and leaves one aghast at the antics and machinations of politicians and the political system itself. It was very cleverly written with clearly drawn characters which the LADS cast created well. It also appeared to show the power of the Whips over backbenchers and the lengths to which they would go to secure the right results....for their own party! Like most of the LADS programmes I found the information at the front of the programme of great interest and help. It carefully explained all about the Whips and their purpose within the mechanism of Parliament, but also said explained about the many acts of kindness to colleagues which is part of their stock-in-trade. It also gave some background to the terminology used within the play with which members of the audience may not be familiar and thus made the enjoyment of the production that much greater.

I thought this was a very authentic set, interesting with all the paraphernalia associated with a busy office. Congratulations to Wayne Gilbert, Sue Bonner and Stephen Radley for all the hard work they must have done to bring this set to life. All the furniture was well positioned and comfortable with a large notice board at the back adorned with small photographs of all the party members of Parliament – the reason for which became clear as the play progressed. A very simple lighting and sound plot served the action well.

The characters were well drawn, as previously mentioned, and developed well throughout, sometimes with mercurial changes in their situations and attitudes, particularly when trying to decide who had been ‘got at’ regarding the impending vote.

Alastair (Deputy Chief Whip) – Howard Platt was quietly commanding in his role. He appeared to virtually run the office, but bowed to the superiority of the Chief Whip when the situation demanded. Their relationship was one of mutual respect. A lovely clear voice delivered some very pithy dialogue in a most commanding manner, although there was a touch of the iron hand in the velvet glove at times. I felt he could have been a little less static in places though. I know there was not an excess of space on the set, but very few people stand completely still when speaking. When talking to Guy at the beginning it is not necessary for them both to look at each other all the time, it’s good to see you full face rather than in profile...and the voices carry better to the back of the hall.

Guy (Backbench MP) – Tom Donoghue, was suitably nervous at having just delivered his maiden speech, but even more so at being summoned to the Whip's office. He continued to be nervous, as I suspect a new MP would be in the face of the rulers of the House, except when, later, he spoke about how hard he had worked to become an MP and how he didn't think that being exposed as gay would help his cause. Here he spoke with determination and passion which, hitherto, he had not shown, so that was very surprising. There was a good analogy throughout regarding cricket when Guy spoke about having a good innings but not scoring a boundary. It was included in the conversation with Tim in a most natural manner of speaking.

Tim (Junior Whip)- David Stelfox, seemed a complicated character to unravel. He was obviously in politics because 'Daddy' had money and was also obviously not in the same social sphere as the people with whom he shared the office. However he did show very obvious signs of being manipulative and devious to a great degree when the situation called for this, and, of course, at the end of the play really proved he had what it took to be a wearer of the highly valued striped tie. He could have done with a bit more light and shade in his dialogue because it was very easy to lose the meaning of what was being said. However, his delivery was punchy and energetic, emphasising, I think, his determination and force.

The Chief Whip – Richard de Berry was laid back and rather lugubrious, having been there and done it on his way to the top. His interaction with Alastair was even handed but with Tim his dislike and suspicion about his upbringing made him doubtful as to whether he had what it took to succeed in the Whip's office. However in Act II there was really good interaction with Tim, full of sincerity about his own life and Tim's future. He was also a very cunning man, as his 'heart attack' showed, thus managing to manipulate Tim into doing the right thing. His exit from office was not maudlin, just matter of fact that someone had to be sacrificed, and he accepted that his time in office had run its course and it was time for a change – well handled. There was a good partnership between the Chief Whip and the Deputy during the action with the 'prisoner' next door in the Chief Whip's office in an attempt to break guy's nerve...lots of yelling and moaning made for a very convincing episode.

Maggie (Researcher) – Lydia Dronsfield managed to fool everybody (including the audience I think), except that Alastair, with his vast knowledge of human beings, saw through her scheme. She was very convincing as the 'researcher', and then just as convincing in her real life situation as an undercover reporter trying to expose how the Whip's office worked and the power they had to control the members by the belief that they held secret information about them. I initially thought that maybe Lydia looked rather young for the role, but her excellent delivery and many varied expressions, both facial and bodily overrode that thought and I found her most believable.

Delia (Deputy Chief Whip for the Opposition) – Karen Rogers was as devious as her counterparts and showed great delight when her trick worked regarding members of her party who should have been dining too late for the vote. Good solid dialogue and way of standing and moving emphasised the superiority of characterisation, she was a woman making her mark in a man's world, obviously successfully. Again a bit more variance in the delivery of the dialogue would have helped. Would she have been so acerbic all the time or is that attitude par for the course in politics?

It was unfortunate that there was a bit of a hiatus with words at one point, but it was well overcome and did not appear to affect the concentration of the other members of the cast. Although a very wordy play there was sufficient action/movement to give it some visual interest.

Congratulations to all the cast and crew and especially to Cathy Naylor on her directing debut.

Jacquie Stedman
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