

Society : Loughton Amateur Dramatic Society
Production : Beyond Reasonable Doubt
Date : 27th March 2015
Venue : Lopping Hall, Loughton
Report by : Jacquie Stedman

[Show Report](#)

I was very pleased to be asked to report on your recent production of this well staged drama. We may not like Jeffrey Archer as man or politician, but he really does tell a good tale and this was gripping from start to finish. Your Director's notes were very telling I thought, and made interesting reading. I think it would be even more interesting if you could include small biogs of the cast – it helps to know if they are first-timers or more experienced (especially from the reviewer's point of view!).

I liked the idea of using the audience as the jury, whether this is as written in the script or not. It meant that all the dialogue was directed out to the audience and consequently was heard clearly and audibly. We were also able to see full facial expressions and there was also a feeling of involvement in the action taking place in the Courtroom. I found the whole production gripping and was totally absorbed in the development of the plot. I believe this was mostly due to the fact that we were witnessing real people in a real situation – no farce, no sex and no magic. A factual trial similar to many we would read about in the newspapers every day. This gave the performances some gravitas and the audience could believe they really were in the Old Bailey watching a man battle for both his life and reputation. There was well delivered humour in places which helped to relieve some of the tensions being created. The casting was well thought through and played to the strengths of the actors involved. In writing the notes for this report they seemed to fall distinctly into two sections because the personalities we saw portrayed in Act I were not the same as in Act II so one's opinion of them changes accordingly.

The simple courtroom set dressed with pink be-ribboned briefs on the table below the judge looked authentic with a high bench for Mr Justice Tredwell and two smaller benches either side for the prosecution and defence counsels. The idea of just having the red curtain at the back of the judge's bench with the black legs to the side of the stage helped to create a very focused feeling and that, coupled with the lighting and the fact that the audience was the 'fourth wall' created an intimate containment to the staging. The atmospheric music of Mike Oldfield's Tubular Bells for Act I and then Act II finishing with a touch of Clannad, were both very evocative for this piece of theatre. The cliffhanger at the end of Act I stayed in the imagination (despite the interval) and in no way spoilt the anticipation of seeing what had actually happened in Act II

Act I was very gripping throughout. Although wordy it was not static at all with the players making full use of the stage, opening it up with lots of movement from Blair Booth in his examination of the prosecution witnesses.

The judge, Mr Justice Treadwell (Roger Barker) was ponderous in his speeches and in relation to the jury, but I felt his dialogue was considered and unhurried in an effort to explain all the workings of the testimonies and his learned colleagues to the jury. I felt this was a well-observed characterization.

It appeared that Act I was 'controlled' by Anthony Blair Booth QC (Howard Platt). His questions were incisive and his delivery direct. In spite of his opening speech in which he refers to the fact that he is prosecuting a colleague, where we assume that he has some regard for Sir David Metcalfe QC, he goes for the jugular when cross-examining him. This becomes more understandable when we learn in Act II that he once had proposed to Lady Metcalfe when they were all at university and before she met Sir David. And because Blair Booth never married it seemed to indicate that he still harboured a grievance towards the man whom, possibly, he blames for his living a bachelor's existence. There was a lot of animation in Howard's performance which gave conviction to his characterization.

Detective Chief Inspector Travers (Peter Huber) delivered his testimony in a very factual and unemotional tone, but with the presence one would expect from a senior police officer. His diction was clear and he referred to his notes in an appropriate manner.

Mrs Rogers (Eileen Stock) obviously disliked Sir David and made no pretence of this. She felt she had seen the murder committed and lost no time in transmitting that belief to the whole court. Her dialogue was delivered with certainty, entertaining no suggestions contrary to the opinions which she lost no time in conveying to the Court.

Both Dr Weeden (Phil Postings) and Lionel Hamilton (Richard De Berry) were either friends or acquaintances of Sir David and his wife so their testimonies were very different – not so damning and more guarded than Mrs Rogers. Between them they painted a very different picture of the couple and their marriage. Dr Weeden was rather more diffident than Lionel Hamilton, but that could have been due to their relative positions in the community.

Robert Pierson (Neil Grosvenor) looked very convincing when sitting listening to the examination of witnesses by Blair Booth but unfortunately I didn't think he had thought enough about the manner and personality of a Junior Council. Being a Junior does not mean that you have just started, it just means you have not taken silk, and often the junior does not get much of a chance to cross examine witnesses in a trial of this kind. I think you needed to portray more confidence in the role and as you have a rather low voice you (and indeed the audience) would have benefitted from your taking the dialogue slower and louder. Remember too that in Act II mention is made of your soon taking silk which would indicate that you are a barrister of some years standing – try and portray that. Sir David obviously had a lot of respect and admiration for your character and you should show the audience that is justified.

The Court Usher (Chelsea Camp) spoke clearly and unemotionally and certainly looked the part. I wonder if this was one of the points of court etiquette that was mentioned in the Director's Notes. I confess to a lack of knowledge as to whether court officials should have any inflection in their voices.

Although having no dialogue Mr Cole (Dave Hinkley) was 'in the story' throughout paying close attention to all the questions and undertaking various tasks as requested by his leading Counsel.

Martin Howarth as the Prison Officer fulfilled his duties convincingly.

The lighting on the judge at the end of Act I was excellent and it closed with us having no knowledge of the verdict.

The atmosphere for Act II was totally different and the set was such a wonderful contrast from the austere Courtroom. There was comfort and elegance in the Metcalfe home, together with a warmth created by two people who are happy together.

We had learned in Act I that Lady Metcalfe was seriously ill with an incurable condition, but she never allowed this to dominate her personality and fought hard, in her character, to keep it under control. Although she spent much of the act sitting down there was never a feeling of passivity, she still maintained a love of life, a sense of humour and interest in the lives of her dinner guests. A lovely portrayal by Jean Cooper, full of depth, sensitivity and grace.

It was obvious that the marriage was a very happy, loving one and I must congratulate both Andrew and Jean for their convincing portrayal of such. The actors do not have to be all over each other (like a rash) but there has to be some empathy and understanding of what makes a good marriage and this, in turn, has to be conveyed to the audience. Even though they were both past the first flush of youth and young love, we were aware of the care and concern each had for the other and how, ultimately, Sir David's concern for the welfare of his wife regarding the manner of her dying, was more important than the fact that he would have to live without her.

Sir David Metcalfe in the Courtroom was the supreme actor, parrying questions from the Prosecution, asking searching questions of the witnesses and telling his truthful story to the defence. Sir David Metcalfe in the home was witty, charming, sympathetic and honest.....and delivered Dylan Thomas in Welsh English very movingly when he sat with Millicent after she had taken the other pill. This was a part in which no actor could hide his emotions and Andrew Rogers produced a very truthful characterisation – not an overcoat in sight!!

It is in Act II that we see the full depth of Mrs Rogers dislike for Sir David, although nothing was too much trouble for Lady Metcalfe. Her body language said it all! We also see how she had misconstrued what she had seen on the night of Lady Metcalfe's death. Lady Metcalfe and Sir David also had a dramatic way of speaking to each other, which was something else that was misunderstood by Mrs Rogers. This helped us to understand why she gave the testimony that she did – albeit that it was incorrect.

There was a lovely cameo from Richard de Berry as Lionel Hamilton in Act II – a strong friendship between the two men built from mutual respect. There was genuine concern from Hamilton regarding Lady Metcalfe's health and Sir David's future.

In Scene 5, after the trial, the actions of Sir David seemed entirely the correct thing to do following his assistance in his wife's 'suicide'. He was neither maudlin nor sorry for himself – just honest enough in his belief and actions to know that he had no desire to continue with his life without his wife. Both the deaths of Lady Metcalfe and Sir David were handled with extreme care and sensitivity with absolutely no histrionics ...well done!

Congratulations on the attention to detail in the costumes, which were, as ever, the usual standard delivered by Christine Eckley and Liz Adams.

A good solid set designed and constructed by Garry Cooper – totally in keeping with the story and the status of Sir David and Lady Metcalfe, with suitable props under the control of Cathy Naylor and Steph Adleman.

Lighting and Sound Design by Terry Tew and Mary Lowe respectively, and operated by Adam Rabinowitz added greatly to the atmosphere of the piece.

Thank you so much for giving David and I the opportunity to see the play from both the point of view of the audience and a NODA report writer...we had much to discuss!!!!

Jacquie Stedman
Regional Councillor
NODA London