



Society : Loughton Amateur Dramatic Society
Production : The Imaginary Invalid
Date : 12/6/14
Venue : Lopping Hall
Report by : Jackie Mitchell

Report

The Imaginary Invalid is an interesting look at attitudes towards the so called medical profession in the 1600s, and certainly suggests that Molière himself had no great respect for the doctors of his time, perhaps despite the views of some of his colleagues. The production itself was an interesting one, with some good performances, but the flow was perhaps not as strong as it could have been, with many of the characters not seeming to connect that well with each other.

The set was rather sparser than I am accustomed to seeing with LADS productions, and such furnishings as there were seemed a little mismatched, and not completely appropriate for what one assumed was a relatively wealthy family, despite Monsieur Argan's somewhat miserly ways. It would have been nice to have seen a little more detail in the set, to make it feel more like a home, but it was functional enough, and all the pieces of furniture suited their purpose well enough. Lighting, although also rather basic, was unobtrusive, and worked well enough within the remit of the play and set.

Costuming was generally good throughout the play, with some nice touches throughout. The costumes all seemed suited to the era and the characters wearing them and despite the heat of the theatre and the obvious weight and layers of clothing worn, the cast all coped well with them. Toinette's disguise as the male doctor in the second half could have done with more fully covering her dress, as it was hard to believe even Argan would be fooled by it given that a large amount of her dress was still showing underneath, but aside from this the costuming was effective. Makeup was also well used, and Argan in particular was convincing as a man who was perhaps not in the best of health – great attention appeared to have been paid to making his face look subtly sunken, helping to convey that whether his illness was contrived or not, he certainly spent far too long sitting inside.

There can be no doubt that the plays success rested on the shoulders of the man playing Monsieur Argan, and Iain Howland gave a superb performance, delivering great nuances of characterisation to give us a completely plausible and rounded character. His miserly nature was instantly apparent, as was his hypochondria – this was clearly a man who revelled in the power his 'illness' gave him, together with the various concoctions he could choose to imbibe depending on the exact nature of his symptoms. Not a man one would particularly enjoy living with either, his relationships with the various other cast members were all well placed, and his performance was integral to the overall success of the show.

As the maid, Toinette, Karen Rogers gave a strong performance, but her character seemed a little too modern at times. The strength of the character was undisputable, but somehow, her mannerisms and intonation meant that her characterisation seemed a little out of place for 1600s France, most especially in her interactions with the men. Perhaps a more subtle manipulative character would have been more in keeping with the nature of women in that era. Similar comments could be made of Lorna Redburn's performance as Argan's elder daughter, Angelica. There were some lovely moments from her, most particularly in her relationship with her sister and Cleante, but many of her expressions and responses seemed somehow a little too modern for a young lady of the 1600s. I know that we often say people haven't changed, but there can be no doubt that attitudes have, and

certainly in their dealings with men and their elders, a somewhat more subdued and perhaps subversive manner would have seemed more plausible for these two strong women.

Eileen Stock gave a decent performance as Argans wife, Beline. Her somewhat shallow and conniving characterisation suited the role well, although a little more depth in the scenes when she was openly plotting with the lawyer would have helped bring out the more hidden nature of this rather unpleasant character more fully. However, her somewhat patronising tone when speaking to many of the other players was well judged, and she delivered a generally plausible, if rather unlikeable character.

Howard Platt gave a nice almost cameo performance as the lawyer Monsieur Bonnefoy. He always gives a strong and characterful performance, with a great sense of timing, and also generally selects roles that suit his style of playing, and this was no exception. His dialogue delivery was clear with some good comic moments that worked well bouncing off the shallow Beline.

Tom Donoghue was a rather immature and desperate Cleante, mad to marry the woman of his dreams, and really seeming rather too young to know his own mind. This characterisation worked generally well against the other cast members, and his scenes with Angelica were very nicely done. However, a little more assertiveness in his scenes with Argan and Toinette in particular would have given his character more strength.

Roger Barker was nicely arrogant and brusque as Dr Diaforus. His characterisation was excellent, and his selective blindness to his son's lack of ability was very plausible. Nick Martin was suitably obnoxious as the rather idiotic son, Thomas and it was easy to see why Angelica would have no desire to marry into that family.

There were a number of other smaller roles that were all reasonably well performed. Charlotte Rogers gave a lovely performance as Louise, Argan's younger daughter. Her characterisation and defiance of her father were very well judged, as was her eventual revealing of the relevant information. Phil Postings was suitably exasperated as Monseieur Beralde, and both Martin Hopwarth and Foster Barnett were nicely arrogant and self-secure as the apothecary and Dr Purgon respectively.

Directed by Wendy Butler, this play contained some very nice performances, but overall, stylistically it felt somewhat too modern for the time of the piece. This was particularly true of the female characters, and their interactions with the men. A little more subtlety in these characters and their interactions with others would have added far more realism to the play, which could also have done with a little more attention paid to how any of the characters interacted with each other. There were several moments when the relationships between various characters seemed a little contrived, and this was rather jarring to the flow of the action. The scene at the end, when Argan became inducted into the 'doctorhood' himself was also very odd seeming. Not only introducing characters who had no business being involved in such a scheme, but also suddenly adding a hint of false magic to the play, which until now had been firmly placed in the real world. This may have been partly due to Moliere and/or Miles Malleson's words, but keeping this scene smaller, with only those involved in the 'fraud' would have seemed a much better choice to keep the realism of what until that moment had been a predominantly character driven play.

I would like to thank LADS for the invitation to see this play, and also the various others I have seen over the past few years. As you are no doubt aware, I am standing down as rep this July due to work commitments and a move away from the area, and there is no doubt I will sorely miss the generally excellent productions I have seen from LADS at Lopping Hall. I wish you every success in your future shows, and hope you continue to thrive, and receive excellent audiences for you many wonderful plays.

Jackie Mitchell
Regional Representative
NODA London District 6