



Society : Loughton Amateur Dramatic Society
Production : Lord Arthur Saville's Crime
Date : 14/1/11
Venue : Lopping Hall
Report by : Jackie Mitchell

Report

A delightful period romp based on a short story by Oscar Wilde, this was a light-hearted play in a similar vein to *The Importance of Being Earnest*, highlighting for comic effect the ridiculousness of some upper class attitudes in the 1890s, allowing the audience to guess what was coming next, and watch as the twits on stage fell headlong from one disaster to the next, all the while displaying their own unique set of moral values. With some very well placed performances, and some great one-liners, the play bowled along in an energetic fashion, despite a few moments of uncertainty from the cast, and left the audience wondering what could possibly happen next, and how on earth things would be resolved in the end.

The set was a boldly coloured drawing room in Lord Arthur's house, with some wonderful detailing not only in the numerous pictures, but also in the fine detailed wooden borders on the wall, which lifted the walls out of the mundane, and made the set feel like a real home. The matching wooden arm chairs were a perfect foil for the room, and also added to the period feel of the play. They were also well used throughout, and the placing of both these and the sofa around the set seemed natural, while still allowing all cast members to be clearly seen no matter where they were sitting. The various pieces of other furniture around the room were also ideally suited to the set, and added a real sense of homeliness to the set. The changing floral arrangements in the room and the opening and closing of the curtains were very nice touches, and the numerous smaller props, including the various pieces of silverware and the drinks and glasses were all well suited to the period of the play.

This play did not call for any major lighting effects, and throughout the play, everyone was well lit, while the lighting itself remained unnoticed, which was exactly what the play required. There were a number of sound effects during the play, and these were for the most part well timed and suited to the moment. Perhaps a bell, rather than a knocker, might have worked better to announce new arrivals at the door, but overall, the sound effects worked well and the music that opened each half of the play was well chosen.

Overall, costuming was good. Sadly, Sybil's first dress seemed rather badly fitting and the sleeveless style of Julia's first dress seemed a little modern, but aside from that, the costumes not only seemed well in period, but also suited the individual characters wearing them. The ladies hats in particular were nicely varied, and again helped to give a real period feel to the show. The various personal props, such as the bags and umbrellas, while often not necessarily required by the script, were a really nice touch, helping to set the characters more firmly, and making it easy to believe that they really had just called in from somewhere else.

Focused on the efforts of Lord Arthur, aided and abetted by his butler, Baines, to commit a murder prior to his marriage to his fiancée, Sybil, the play offered some great opportunities for real character performances. In the main, the performances were very good, although it did seem to take a little while for things to warm up. As the eponymous hero, Lord Arthur, Spencer Mills gave an assured and confident performance. He did seem to have a few line problems, but this was a very large role, and overall, his word losses were minimal. With some very natural seeming dialogue delivery, and a good physical performance, he very successfully portrayed the

rather foolish, but well meaning young lord, with his rose-coloured glasses still very much intact, and his complete reliance on his staff to do the majority of his dirty work for him.

As his butler, Baines, Howard Platt gave an inspired performance. The variety of facial expressions we were treated to were wonderful, always perfectly suited to the mood of the character, and fitting in perfectly with his extremely well-timed and well-delivered one-liners, often adding to the humour of the moment. His characterisation was perfect as a rather Jeeves-like character, and the nodding along to the piano-playing at the opening of the play was a great touch.

As Lord Arthur's fiancée, Sybil, Sophie Robertson gave a very believable performance as an ingenuous, upper class young lady. Her relationship with Arthur was nicely placed, and her reaction to his confession to attempting murder was the epitome of upper class selfish practicality. Her dialogue delivery was always very natural sounding, and this was a confident and stylish performance.

As the only other co-conspirator in the murder plot, Jon Gilbert, as Herr Winkelkopf gave a variable performance. At times his characterisation and accent were spot on, but he had a real tendency to slip too much into a London accent, not only losing the German accent, but also losing the more stilted delivery that the character and his dialogue called for, his volume also seemed to drop at this time, and although he was always audible, this also seemed out of character. Physically however, his posture and facial expressions were good throughout, and this was a fun characterisation.

Karen Rogers gave a generally good performance as Lady Julia Merton, Sybil's mother. A little more authority from her in the early stages of the play would have been good, particularly when politely insulting Lady Windermere, but she seemed to settle more into the part as the play progressed, and her performance by the end was ideally suited to the role, making it easy to see why she would have so much power over the prospective wedding plans.

As the aforementioned Lady Windermere, Sylvia Zilesnick gave a reasonably good performance. As with Julia, a little more haughtiness and pointed delivery of her insults would have lifted the performance at the beginning of the play, but she also settled in as things progressed. Lisa Mathews gave another good performance as Lady Clementina. On occasions her rather drawling delivery was perhaps just a little too slow, slightly dropping the pace of the show, but this was a good characterisation, proving a nice contrast to the other rather more arrogant ladies.

Iain Howland gave a great performance in the small but crucial role of Mr. Podgers. His slightly obsequious and slimy character was perfectly placed, and the clasping and rubbing of the hands, particularly in his fingerless gloves, really helped in this respect, a subtle, but very clever way to establish the character. Then, as a direct contrast, his abrupt change to the thoroughly unpleasant blackmailer, including the change of accent, and the opening up of the hands and arms was very well handled, and his return to the hand-clasping clearly showed the true nature and ability of this con-artist.

As the slightly batty seeming Dean of Paddington, Foster Barnett gave another great performance. Both his posture and slightly bow-legged walk, together with his slightly husky, and yet powerful dialogue delivery, were perfect for the priest/uncle that all these upper class families seem to have, and his entire characterisation seemed very natural.

Finally, Jean Cooper, as Nellie the Maid, gave a lively and energetic, and slightly common performance, that created a very nice contrast to the rest of the cast. Her character's naivety came across well, and she interacted well and naturally with Baines, helping to set up a plausible relationship with him.

Directed by Sue Cole, this was a fun and well-conceived play, with some great character interactions, and some simple yet highly effective staging. The cast moved about the room very naturally, with the comic moments brought to the fore by ensuring the appropriate character was always in a prime position. Various moves allowing characters such as Julia and Lady Windermere to give each other a look were very well placed, seeming natural, yet maximising the humour of these relationships. The period feel of the piece was at all times maintained due both to good consistent performances from the cast, coupled with some very well placed direction, allowing the relationships and set to help maintain the illusion of 1890s England. At times lacking a little pace, with a few uncertain moments from the cast, it could perhaps have done with one more week rehearsal to really up the slickness, however, despite this, it was a well-performed and very entertaining light-hearted play, and something that overall the cast should feel very proud of.

I would like once again to most sincerely LADS for your invitation to see the play, and again, what a joy to see an almost full house - well deserved given the continuing high standard of your productions - long may it continue.

Jackie Mitchell
Regional Representative
NODA London District 6