



Society : Loughton Amateur Dramatic Society
Production : A Lie of the Mind
Date : 5th April 2014
Venue : Lopping Hall
Report by : Jacquie Stedman

Report

I was pleased to stand in for your Regional Rep Jackie Mitchell to review this play by Sam Shepard, which is part of your 90th anniversary year programme. Although, according to the programme Shepard describes this as 'A love ballad....a little legend about love', I thought it was also about relationships within families and the hurt that can be caused to those we love. It was useful to have the mini synopsis in the programme which gave some explanation as to the psychology behind the characters. There was also some interesting information about the author which is always useful when he/she is not very well known by the reviewer.

Due to the nature of the construction of the play you had used a simple set showing various locations for the action, with the clever use of lighting these areas as the story moved from scene to scene. Likewise the simple, modern costumes suited the characters and gave the impression of hard working folk. The lighting was well thought out and the fades were quick (when appropriate) and complete. The hospital bed, had to remain as long as Beth was detained in hospital, but I wondered whether there was a 'window' DSL as Jake tended to look that way a lot during his dialogue with Frankie at the beginning of the play. It was a shame that the furniture had to be moved about with more noise than necessary. The (mostly) upbeat music belied the traumas taking place on stage, but set the action in a remote part of the USA with the hillbilly/country sound. At the end of the play the light in the bucket and on the wall reinforced the idea of the house burning even though it was such a long way away.

It took time to get used to the short scenes which moved from location to location. They felt rather disjointed at first but each scene encapsulated the mood of the characters and the piece of the action at the time. Each one also seemed to focus on a different element of the dysfunctionality of the characters. The opening, where the two brothers were on the telephone, would have been easier for the audience if Frankie had been further towards the stage as some of his dialogue was lost, and Jake spent a lot of his time with his back to the us so we lost some of his too, although I quite understand that the feeling of distance had to be established between the two of them.

From the start it was obvious that all the characters were disturbed to some degree and they all had their own demons with which they were struggling – some more than others – and it was often difficult to understand why they were reacting the way they were. Given the subject matter of the play it was surprising to find humour in the dialogue, but this was well delivered and did help to give the characters another dimension.

Frankie (Tom Donoghue) was concerned for his brother and keen to help, although he did, gently, raise doubts about Jake's assumption that his wife was having an affair. He showed logic when talking with Jake, and a gentleness, perhaps borne of experience that he could erupt without warning. In Act II, when the worm finally turned, he was confused by Beth's advances to him but was trapped by his shot leg – which no one seemed to care about, almost using it as a reason to keep him in the house. I think that he needed to have a bit more light and shade in his characterisation. I felt that his rejection of Beth (because she was Jake's wife) wasn't quite believable, and that he would succumb and remain with her in the house, almost as a prisoner. Tom had a lovely clear voice and all his dialogue was easily heard when on stage. He was generally calm making a perfect foil for Jake.

Jake (Jon Gilbert) was an obviously disturbed individual and he played this to perfection. He seemed incapable of listening to reason and it was fairly obvious that something had happened in his past which was haunting him. His relationship with his siblings and his mother was very different, although there was a sort of affinity with Sally, whom he appeared to trust, presumably born of the terrible secret they shared. He was obviously very jealous of Beth's friendship with anyone else and most unforgiving, but I thought it very touching at the end of the play when he goes to her house and kisses her on the forehead with a gentleness I would not have imagined he could possess.

Sally (Camilla Steel) Sally appeared to be the only level headed person involved in this situation. She was strong willed, but there were times when even she needed some show of affection from her mother. Her account of her father's accident and Jake's part in it all was well delivered with the horror of the situation gradually dawning on her again, as it must have at the time it happened. She seemed frustrated that her mother would accuse her of trying to murder her father and put the blame onto Jake, but she bore it all with a kind of sympathy for her mother when she learned the truth. She also seemed genuinely surprised when looking through the old photographs to realise that her mother had once been happy with her father. The scene between her and Lorraine was very touching in parts and almost convinced us of the better life to come for them both.

Lorraine (Frances Chalkwright) was a woman living a life she really did not want to live and perhaps would never have envisaged when she was first married. The desertion of the family by her husband made her the brittle, no nonsense woman she was but she was protective of Jake and showed this throughout her speeches. In fact she really did have a blind spot where Jake's faults were concerned, and throughout the play she retained the brittleness of a woman deserted and left with three small children. Despite her lack of physical affection for the children there remained elements of a disappointed life, and a realisation that it could possibly be better elsewhere. Well balanced with hints of dark humour, exasperation and desperation.

Beth (Sophie Robertson) had a very difficult part to play because there could, possibly, have been no personal experience (one hopes) to draw on. Her eventual 'recovery' was played with depth of feeling and demonstrated that although her speech may have been impaired there was a functioning woman still able to make coherent thoughts. It was very hard to understand Beth's dialogue at the beginning, but this gave an insight as to the degree of beating she had received. Unfortunately she remained rather difficult to understand,

although it did improve slightly as the play progressed. Could she not have stayed in the bed through the first scenes, with the lights just being brought up on her when necessary? It rather destroys the flow of the action when the 'sick' person keeps getting out of bed to leave the stage. It was clear that her brother was the one who had most concern for her throughout the play and she responded well to this particularly when she was in hospital.

Mike (Dean Bartholomew) was very sympathetic at the beginning when his sister was in hospital but was frustrated and disgusted that no one appeared to care about the fact that Jake had come to the house to see his own wife. He appeared to have a very short fuse and was frustrated by Beth's inability to hate Jake in spite of what he had done to her. This was a well observed part but I did find it somewhat difficult to listen to because of the amount of shouting that went on when the family were together in their home. Sometimes, when the dialogue is delivered with a quieter tone there is more menace and emotion than when it is at full volume. I also wonder whether there could have been another way of bringing the deer into the house. I would not have thought it possible that one person could carry the rear end of an animal that size, and perhaps if the 'body' had been put into a sack with a leg sticking out it could have been dragged on, which is what would possibly have happened because of the size and weight.

Baylor (Paul Caira) and his wife Meg (Sylvia Zilesnick) were something else when it came to the care of their daughter. Baylor was selfish and showed lack of feeling and understanding for his entire family - deeming it unnecessary to see Beth when she was in the hospital and showing very little thought for her condition when she was at the house. He delivered his lines in a very offhand way, giving the impression, throughout the play, that his family were really not as important as his livelihood. He worked well with Meg who, as the 'little woman', showed more insight that might have been expected. Meg was in a little world of her own. She was placid, calm and really not totally in tune with the gravity of the situation. I couldn't believe that she could be so calm in such terrible circumstances, but one got the impression that she was in this little world as a protection from the realities of life. A gentle performance with flashes of insight.

This cannot have been an easy play to direct or rehearse but, as ever, you certainly gave the audience something to think about, and I hope it was successful both artistically and financially.

Jacquie Stedman

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