



Society : Loughton Amateur Dramatic Society
Production : The Six-Days World
Date : 25/3/11
Venue : Lopping Hall
Report by : Jackie Mitchell

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A very interesting play set during one modern day family's Christmas, and performed in the round (or "in the thrust" as described in the program), this was a moving tale depicting the long-term heart-break and guilt that the death of a family member can have on the surviving members. With some very well-judged and emotional performances from the cast, this play had a realism about it that was reinforced by the intimacy of the performance space, making the audience feel almost uncomfortably involved in the action at times, and seeming very much like the slightly awkward family Christmas one often hears about.

The staging of this play in the round led to rather different set challenges to the ones usually encountered on a standard stage, with three major scenes needed throughout the play. The use of one square performance area, divided into two triangles, forming the garage and living room was a very clever idea, clearly defining the two different spaces, and yet allowing each room to spill into the other if required. The third scene, in the local pub, being raised slightly and behind the rooms also gave some distance to the scene, which worked well with the less intimate, public location. The set itself was pretty minimal, as the round performance space did not allow for a standard, box set style layout. The various pieces of furniture used however, were well placed, and lent exactly the right feel to the rooms – nice touches like almost finished drinks on the table in the pub really added to the authenticity of the scene, while the placement of the projector directly in between the garage and lounge scenes, with a dust sheet over it when in the garage, was a great way to use it in both scenes. Perhaps a little more masking for the entrance stage left, to match that seen on the stage right side, might have been a good idea, as the casts' entrances could be seen perhaps a little too early on that side, but this is a very minor point in an otherwise very intelligently staged show.

There was some very nice lighting to match the set. The use of focal lighting during the 'reading' moments was a particularly nice touch, not only focusing the attention on the reader, but also adding intensity to the emotion of the moment. Subtle changes in the lighting were also successful in adding to the differing feel of the three scenes, and overall, the lighting was used to very good effect throughout the play.

As a modern show, the costuming really just needed to look like something each character would wear, and this was the case – Ralph's jumper in particular was perfect for his character. Makeup and hair also was appropriate to each character, nothing seemed over the top or out of place.

There were numerous props in the play, such as the wooden figures and box, and these all worked well in the context of the play. Little touches such as the cake in the living room and the CD case were particularly well thought out, and there were many nice touches that again added realism to the set – particularly important when the audience were so close to it.

As a whole the cast seemed a little nervous about the closeness of the audience at the outset of the play, and all the performances seemed to settle in a bit and become more confident as the play progressed. As the father of the family, Ralph, played by Richard De Berry, was very much the hen-pecked husband. Overall, his

performance lacked a real depth of emotion, he could have done with letting go a little more, however, this was a secure and confident performance, and his relationship with his wife and son was nicely judged.

As his wife, Angela, Eileen Stock gave a suitably bossy and irritating performance, her relationship with her family was very believable, and the edge of obsession she had with blaming someone for her son's death was very well done.

As the rather prodigal son, Eddie, Jon Gilbert gave a powerful performance. Quite a complex character, his row with his family was very believable, and left the audience feeling quite uncomfortable, as if they had been a fly on the wall of a real family argument. He was not always a pleasant individual, and while one could sympathise with his irritation to some extent, his outbursts seemed inappropriate for the occasion, something that Jon handled extremely well. His relationship with Cat also worked well, particularly his avoidance of a discussion of the possibility of children.

Lucy Parkin, as Kirsty, also gave a believable performance as the barmaid (and more) with a secret. Her apparent mild interest in the first act was a nice contrast to her more emotional outburst in act 2, when her secret was revealed, and her attitude towards Tom was also very nicely judged.

Dan Cooper, as Tom, gave an inspired performance. He perfectly captured the simple nature of the role, and everything from his loud and slightly disjointed dialogue, to his constantly fidgeting hands helped to establish his character. In addition, his performance never flagged, whenever he was on stage, he was committed to his role one hundred percent.

As the final player, Cat, played by Francis Dennis gave a sensitive performance. Her accent was very good, and sounded natural, while her gentle characterisation balanced very well with the rather stronger Eddie, and her emotions throughout the play were very believable.

Directed by Iain Howland, this was an excellent play, with some very good character interactions. The in the round style did mean that there were occasions where various members of the audience could not easily see the faces of the speakers, and on one occasion, both the person speaking, and the person they were speaking to, were obscured from my seat in the audience, however, it is difficult to avoid this sort of thing in this style of show, and the intimate feel of the play more than made up for a few minor visual blockades, indeed, in many ways, this added to the feel of being a member of the family, witnessing a discussion (or row) in the family home. There was no overt aim in the script to tell the story, rather, it was left to the audience to understand what had occurred from overhearing the family conversations, and the play was well paced, and the staging sympathetic enough to allow this to happen.

Overall, this was an engrossing play, with some good performances, and a very interesting premise. I would like to thank LADS for inviting me to another highly entertaining evening, and wish them all the best in their future endeavours.

Jackie Mitchell
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