

NORTH ESSEX THEATRE GUILD

FULL LENGTH FESTIVAL 2015 – 16

ADJUDICATION

Group	<i>Wickham Bishops Drama Club</i>
Venue	<i>Wickham Bishops Village Hall</i>
Date of Adj.	<i>Friday 8th April</i>
Production	<i>Inspector Drakes' Last Case</i>
Director	<i>Pauline Roast & Ian Lodge</i>
Adjudicated by	<i>Anne Sexton</i>
Accompanied by	<i>Jenny Burke</i>

Front of House / Publicity

A pleasant and friendly welcome from the team. Refreshments were available during the interval.

The programme is colourful and amusing, with pictures of the cast, in cartoon fashion, on the cover

Set Construction

Described as a mansion in the programme, however, the overall look of the set was not very 'mansion like', a rather plain room, two cream sofas, a small fireplace and few pictures on the walls. The 'French windows' looked out to a garden view, but the curtains did not fit properly and looked rather odd when drawn. In our opinion, although the set was lacking in style and mansion like dressing it did offer the actors space to move around and the furnishings were chosen to facilitate the action / comedy in the play (this included the strange protruding bed pan by the fireplace).

I would also like to mention the lovely old fashioned 'ear trumpet' that Mr Guest used that was Victorian in style.

Lighting Design and Sound

The lighting changes added much to the dramatic moments of the script. Both were on cue and with good volume. The telephone rang quite often and was answered without any overlap of ringing. The dramatic bursts of music were a definite plus to the atmosphere, especially in the first half of the production.

Costumes

Some elegant evening wear was used in the first scene. The gentlemen, in evening suits were as always very smart, apart from the odd looking red bow tie. The ladies, Miss Duck, wore a beautiful 1920's style cocktail dress, Mrs Gagarin in

a lovely lace dress and jacket. Mrs Gardiner was in a rather unfaltering cooks outfit and a red basque was worn by the vicars daughter, which seemed out of place in style to the other costumes. We found that the collection was rather confusing, and no real continuity of era was demonstrated. So once again choices seemed to have been based on the comedy aspects of the play with a mish mash of styles.

CAST

Mrs Gagarin – Ann Hewett

Only briefly seen as she was murdered twice! Ann appeared an elegant and frightened character.

Sargent Plod – Sam Knott

With a lovely country accent, Sam was very much the comic association of the policeman named 'plod'. Amusing and expressive, his comic timing made this a good interpretation and his dialogue was full of bad jokes that he carried off with aplomb. Well Done.

Inspector Drake – Graham Pipe

This was a tour de force of a part to play for any actor, especially making the idiocy of this role believable, this Graham did and he threw himself about the stage with a vigour that was quite exhausting. He also had a good sense of comedy timing, making his character as funny as the script meant him to be. We were both impressed with how he managed to remember so many tongue twisters. Also, a good rapport was created between the two policemen, this was good casting. Well done.

Victor Gagarin – Jack Williams

As the son of the victim, Victor looked very suspicious. Jack portrayed this shifty character with lots of realism, along with his dodgy limp. He was clearly an untrustworthy character.

Miss Duck – Catherine Stott

Playing a rather attractive fashion designer, Catherine had good body language and expression, although, she seemed to struggle with her seduction of the inspector. It was however, rather an amusing moment.

Mr Butler – Ashley Saunders

Spending his time reeling about in a drunken state, Ashley was very funny (was this acting or a miss spent youth?). He was very expressive with his interpretation. His interjections were well timed and hit the mark for comedy.

Mr Guest – Len Howard

Len's Butler was a sweet, bumbling and very deaf man, wielding his old fashioned ear trumpet in all directions made this a lovely characterisation.

Mr Cook – Roger Lyons

A rather aggressive man is Mr Cook the gardener. Roger, with his belligerent manner was right on character.

Mrs Gardener – Linda Burgess

Linda was a rather quiet cook, quite a contrast to the other cast members. We could not always hear her dialogue, which was a shame as she had a manner befitting an old retainer of the family.

Mary Ship – Jane Smith

The brief glimpse of Mary was rather startling as she flashed her red basque – and little else – to the amazed cast and audience.

Stretcher bearers – Michelle Bacon & James Milne

These two carried (!) out their job without fuss.

Production

The script was very funny and the cast handled the comedy well, particularly in the first half. There was a mixture of physical and verbal comedy, which was well executed and the characterisations had been effectively thought through.

With silly business and silly names, it is an amusing play, to which the audience responded with laughter, however this did dip a little. Unfortunately, the pace rather slowed down as the play progressed.

We were both somewhat confused as to which era the play was meant to be, neither costume nor set gave us enough clues and there was a mixture of styles as the mode of playing was not consistent. At one point the actors projected a style that suggested the 1920s – yet this style of playing was not continued throughout.

Conclusion

On the surface this is merely a silly play. This belies just how tough comedy can be to present. A committed cast presented this play well and managed overall to find the humour and comic timing to good effect. In a number of places we were both very impressed.

It was an amusing and enjoyable evening and the audience reaction was very favourable.

Anne Sexton
ADJUDICATOR