**Critique of Mixed Doubles**

**Friday 26th October 27 2018, Prestwood Village Hall**

**Part 1**

 The atmosphere for the plays already drew the audience in with the great idea of Chris Courtney as the vicar being the one to address the audience informing them of the fire exits and to turn off ‘those damnable mobile phones!’ It made me feel as though I was in church for the wedding, along with the rest of the audience/congregation. And it set the scene perfectly for Chris’s monologue as the vicar.

Effective use of lighting and sound effects throughout.

Simple sets – but it didn’t need to have a lot – lovely touch having the pictures up on the projector screen, so it really did convey to us that the actors were in a tent, kitchen or cemetery. Nothing elaborate needed.

I really liked Keith Patton dressed as a handyman (assisted by Sarah Nicholls) coming on to remove the benches etc. It looked as natural as possible, like he was actually part of it.

After the vicar’s stern warning that ‘marriage is not all a bed of roses,’ it seems that the young couple run into trouble the moment they are aboard the train for their honeymoon! The bride criticizes her groom constantly, from the way he walks to his guitar tuning. Lucinda Ross and Vic Rance work well together, an already henpecked, worried groom with a nagging new wife. The play is called ‘Man’s best Friend’ and it clearly shows that it is not a marriage of equals – more a dog/owner relationship than that of husband and wife!

Archie Wilson’s monologue of the Bank Manager came over well, dealing with a tricky customer.

‘Score’ was the play that had the most movement throughout, with Richard and Marley Higham playing tennis and being jealous of their more successful, attractive opponents. The natural chemistry of real life married couple Richard and Marley shone through.

Sarah looked good as the traditional Norland Nannie for her monologue, but I felt she could have spoken a bit louder. Nevertheless, it is my favourite monologue and who on earth would name their son Peregrine, anyway?

Ably tackling ‘Night’ by Harold Pinter were Chris and Lucinda. The beautiful dialogue flowed between the two characters as they spoke of their memories of meeting for the first time. By the end, I was left wondering if it had been another girl, after all.

I didn’t understand what the psychoanalyst’s monologue was about, but I like how Richard brought him to life.

Jacki and Chris’s performance in ‘Permanence’ was the one that got the most laughs from the audience. The woman, Helen, feels she is getting old and she wonders whether her husband, Peter, will leave her, even though they have brought up a child that may or may not be his. It was a good idea to cast Jacki and Chris together. Interval.

**Part 2**

Vic’s portrayal in his monologue of a creepy, not very nice doctor, was an excellent choice to open the second part. Prescribing the same pills for each patient was very funny.

‘Countdown’ by Alan Ayckbourn is an hilarious look at what happens when the marriage is stuck in a rut and the couple are bored with each other. Archie and Sandie were brilliant as the couple, voicing their sarcastic thoughts, as well as their actual speech to each other. I only noticed one mistake – ‘he needs glasses’ – Archie was wearing them!

Vic was back again, this time fired up as an advertising man on the quest for a new campaign. His enthusiasm was infectious and even though it has nothing to do with the next play (unless ‘they live in a house you can only see from trains’) it was an amusing interlude.

Richard was back on stage in ‘Silver Wedding’ – playing his wife this time was Bernadette. What should have been a happy occasion was ruined as it becomes clear that Julian feels they have ‘nothing to celebrate.’ It felt sad that Audrey and Julian felt they were trapped. When he says ‘I hate you, dear,’ I wasn’t sure if he meant it or not. ‘Countdown’ was funny but this one was serious. Well done, Richard and Bernadette.

Jacki’s monologue was The Director and like the ad man, at first I was unsure how it linked to the following play, but then I realized – as the Director barks instructions to the camera crews, she says ‘close up on the old girl’ and the next play is about an old couple. The Director was strong and bossy, and again provided light relief in between the two plays. Even though it seems as if the monologues don’t make sense, they do and have every right to be there – and everyone played them well – portraying everyday characters you would (or perhaps wouldn’t!) want to meet.

Archie and Sandie were reunited again for the final play ‘Resting Place.’ This one is especially poignant as the couple are soon to be parted by the husband’s death. They don’t have much money, but the man did his best to provide for his wife. The woman’s longing for an angel to bring peace was very sweet, as was all the exchanges about kippers and pikelets. Who needs orchids when you’ve got kippers? As with ‘Countdown,’ Archie and Sandie have the ability to make people cry as well as laugh. My favourite line was ‘Fred Turtle? Is he dead?’ ‘Well, they’ve just buried him!’

This was an excellent production, proving that plays starring just two people are just as entertaining and powerful to watch as those with a bigger cast. I look forward to seeing more like that and you should all be very proud of yourselves. I really enjoyed it. Well done, everyone.

Mandy Durrell

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