

'Murder in Rehearsal' by Angela Lanyon

Performed by Richings Players, 12th October 2007

Directed by John Draper

There is always an air of anticipation that absorbs an audience prior to a murder mystery and this production of 'Murder in Rehearsal' was no exception. As with a pantomime, it is not a form of theatre that you stumble into without getting involved and from the moment I arrived there was a buzz in the air and it was obvious that the audience were fired up and ready to have a good time. I have never seen this show performed before so I was unsure as to what to expect but I am especially fond of comedy and I fully recognise the complexity of getting the balance just right.

Backstage

Front of House

I received a warm and friendly welcome by the front of house team. Throughout the evening the staff were very efficient and kept in the spirit of things. This really enhanced the whole experience.

Set, sound and lighting

The tone and setting of the village hall was perfect for this sort of show. A simple set; although the stage is small the space was used very well. I loved the witch, it really added to the air of mystery! Sound and lighting were straightforward and just the job.

Props

I am a real fan of detail. The little touches can make all the difference and this was spot on.

Costume

Again, this was very simple & believable. It could have been easy to dress characters a bit more flamboyantly but it wouldn't have been appropriate to do so.

Continuity

Were there any prompts?! I would've thought this was the most boring job in the world last night! Everybody seemed word perfect so if the prompt did have any participation in the evening at all then it was a job well done!

Programme, fliers and posters

Nicely presented, the programme gave a good appetiser of what was to come.

Cast

Doreen- Linda Bainbridge

This was a really strong performance. The audience warmed to Doreen- there was some real humour, well delivered. Nicely done, not over done- perhaps she could've been a little more so once or twice, but a smashing performance none the less, so well done.

Tracey- Sally Tugwell

Some people are so naturally talented they make it look as though they are not acting, but living the moment and Sally is one of these people. She had some dark, challenging moments which she performed beautifully with just the right amount of emotion. It is very difficult to play the only straight character in a comedy but Sally did this very successfully.

Simon- Nigel Gravette

A charismatic and confident delivery, this was a really lovely performance. His facial expression was excellent as was his use of the stage. Nigel was convincing and gave us a nice interpretation of Simon.

Belle- Louise Hutton

Beautifully bitchy! Louise had good presence from the start and got stronger throughout. I thought she was watchable and showed some great emotions. She was quite shrill at times and needed to be careful of her pitch but aside from that she displayed good levels of pace and a real quality.

Wilmot-Adrian Uzzell

Wilmot is what everyone imagines a director in an amateur dramatics group to be! Adrian exuded a real energy and lifted every moment he was in. His comic timing was finely tuned and polished to perfection. This was a truly memorable and remarkable performance.

Jessica- Kathryn Pike

Kathryn was a brilliant luvvie. She displayed a nice range of emotions; I particularly liked the eccentricity of her character in the second half. I would have appreciated a slower delivery and more pointing on text, but Kathryn oozed style and poise. Well done!

Phil- Mark Capewell

This was a competent and solid performance. Mark seemed very relaxed and displayed a calm fluency throughout. He used the fourth wall well and generally seemed comfortable.

The Policeman

This must have been the quickest arrival ever at the scene of a crime! I really, really liked this touch. It set the tone well, led us nicely into the interval and was totally unexpected.

Direction

I really congratulate you John. Comedy is without a doubt the hardest genre of theatre to both act in and direct. Timing is of the essence and you get to a point in rehearsals when you need an audience to laugh at you to really take it onto another level. Last night's performance was very settled and comfortable and for this reason I have very few comments to make.

I firmly believe that you must wring out every opportunity for a drop of humour right down to the finest detail and whilst this was exceptionally well done by some, there was scope for more. There were occasions when cue bite was a little too slow, the pace dropped and some additional humour was lost. I also felt that when the cast were 'acting in Romeo and Juliet' it could've been overplayed slightly more to extract the absolute most from the scene.

Some of the staging felt a little bit awkward in act 2. Better positioning coupled with heavy pausing really emphasises the contrast between the lighter and darker moments. The use of the hall was excellent and I really liked the way the front of house staff interacted with the audience during the interval.

The chemistry between the characters was superb, a really nice blend of emotions which became more intense as the plot thickened.

Overall, I feel 'Murder by Rehearsal' was performed to a high standard. This is a very well written piece of theatre. The script is fantastic and the whole cast really brought it to life.

Finally, I had heard of Richings players, but never been to see one of their shows. I thoroughly enjoyed my evening, as did the rest of my table and I would like to say thank you very much for inviting me, I hope tonight's show is as successful as last night.

Belinda Mears

13/10/07