



Cornwall Drama Association
a service to amateur drama in Cornwall

THEATRE FESTIVAL 2013 – 2014

PLAYS SECTION

Carnon Downs Drama Group
The Deep Blue Sea seen 17th October 2013

THE PLAY

The play is about mixed and very powerful emotions; different perceptions of love and the depths of despair that can bring someone to the brink of attempting to end their life. We were told from the script used that Rattigan drew on situations from his own life this play is a beautifully written, thought provoking piece of theatre, which must be played with sincerity.

STAGE PRESENTATION

The Set

The play was set on an open end stage with a wall of flats containing doors leading to the hall, kitchen and bedroom and two flats halfway down each side for the window and fireplace, complete with practical gas fire, respectively. The stage was dressed with a chaise longue, a chair and small table appropriate for the period. The pictures on the walls were tasteful and in keeping with the piece. The glimpses off stage showed attention to detail in the bedroom wallpaper, the well filled kitchen fittings, etc. Unfortunately there were no latches showing on the doors to the entrance hall and bedroom. Entrances from the rest of the building were from the stage left of the auditorium, taking actors across the front of the stage and behind the window flat requiring discipline from the cast to remain in character until out of sight.

Properties

Properties were well chosen particularly those used to dress the kitchen, i.e. the 'Courtier' fire, the groceries on the shelf, the opened bottle of wine. The poison medicine bottle, the china tea cup and saucer – nothing jarred. The cigarettes appeared to come from a faintly remembered "Craven A" tin. The mirror had been skilfully soaped and caught no light. Did the currency note have anything on the back? William's handkerchief which he handed to Hester was not crisply laundered.

Costume

Generally speaking this was a well dressed production. The formal suits worn by Philip and Jackie were smart – although only the shoes worn by Philip were of the correct style for the period. Slip-on shoes certainly were not. We expected William Collyer's dress to be immaculate – no chauffeur/handyman would have allowed him to have ventured forth unless his shoes were well polished, and certainly he would never have been seen in evening dress unless wearing evening shoes. His black bow tie did not seem to sit comfortably. Freddie's costume was appropriate (apart from

shoes!). Mr Miller would have got away with being even scruffier, given his circumstances, so he fitted in well. Mrs Elton's, Hester's, Ann's and Jackie's costumes suited their in character.

Makeup

Make up was appropriate throughout.

Lighting

The simple wash lit the scene adequately. We were given a beautiful soft glow for the evening scene.

Sound

We wondered why you had chosen to use amplified sound effects when we could see the action of so many of them. The telephone dialling was particularly intrusive, and surely in the 1950s all London numbers contained three letters and four numbers? [LAD 1234]. The over-amplified sound of keys in doors, etc. was unrealistic. Music level was good and the pieces chosen fitted well.

STAGE DIRECTION

The low lit acting area with an ever increasingly disturbed and distressed Hester already in place was a great atmosphere in which to begin the evening. Sadly few of the audience caught the mood and actually realised they were seeing the very beginning of the story acted out for them. Their loss. From the off the pace was good, cues were smartly picked up and actors were in character from their first lines. There was a good sense of urgency as they found Hester and realised what she had done, which contrasted well with the measured approach of Mr Miller. The firmly delivered slaps were positive, and received without any hint of anticipation, and Hester's recovery was very well acted. Mrs Elton's bustling showed her concern but also some enjoyment at this drama being acted out in her house. Her disclosing of Hester's 'secret' was beautifully done and there was some inspired direction at the passing around of the coffee cup which allowed the audience on each side to see the faces of the actors.

Philip's telephone call to William was timed to allow the person at the other end to respond and was believable. The conversation between the Philip and Ann and Mr Miller had good pace and attack. Perhaps Hester could have been a little more annoyed at the interference of Philip and Ann – there was little for her to apologise for as they left her.

William's entry was dignified but once he and Hester were alone the scene became rather static – there was no sense that they had once been husband and wife, and although we were lead to believe that William was something of a stuffed shirt we expected to see some emotion from him. William's exit from this scene was timed to perfection, as he turned and looked back at Hester.

Freddie had been given such a build up and his appearance did not disappoint. He looked the picture of the character that had been drawn of him. Unfortunately his clipped speech was so swift that we, even with the benefit of having studied the script, missed many of his lines. Perhaps this could have been picked up in rehearsal?

There were some well-held pauses during the scene with Hester and Freddie – neither actor was afraid of silence. Freddie’s reaction to the letter was excellent and his furious exit exactly right.

Act 2

What an atmosphere these two actors managed to convey – the hardly controlled anger and self righteousness of Freddie and the excruciating embarrassment of Jackie was painful to watch – it was so obvious something would have to give. Freddie’s speech was slightly slower here – and his performance was better for it. He was relaxed and moved confidently about the stage whilst he ranted. This scene was well directed with Jackie being ‘pinned’ to his armchair whilst Freddie paced.

There was genuine raw emotion from Hester as she pleaded with Freddie not to leave her and her controlled abandonment of hope was well portrayed as she sobbed at his leaving. Sadly for those in the audience facing the set she was hidden behind the furniture. Her recovery to the music was well done, and helped signify the passing of time. Perhaps the director had allowed this scene to be drawn out just a little too long?

Act III

Hester looked genuinely unhappy at the beginning of this act and she bore the intrusion of her ‘helpful’ neighbours well. The scene between Miller and Hester was very sensitively played and in a few lines we believed each had been driven to the end of their tether. We expected to see some strong emotions coming from William as he saw his chance to take care of Hester and as his hopes of reconciliation were dashed. There was not enough light and shade between the two actors here; there was no variation in the movements of either of them and the pace dragged a little but lifted on the appearance of the so embarrassed Philip who delivered his own confession with feeling. Hester’s telephone conversation with Freddie was heartbreaking to listen to and the timing was excellent and we saw the hand of firm direction as Hester closed the window, found the shilling and prepared to take her own life – tension was well built. Miller’s entrance broke the spell – he gave a strong performance here, although he lost his accent he was totally believable and we could see Hester drawing strength from his personality.

The final few minutes had us holding our breath – was she going to strike that match?

This was always going to be a difficult play to direct, particularly using a format with the audience on three sides. Entrances and exits were timed and so well controlled they enhanced the performance and the director’s skilful grouping and positioning, keeping in mind the needs of the audience, is to be commended.

INDIVIDUAL PERFORMANCES

This team of well schooled actors brought the characters to life and drew us into their, on the whole, troubled lives.

Mrs. Elton

This actor gave a most energetic performance and brought her character off the page. She bustled round the room and drew out all the humour in the script, lifting the mood for us when required. A well considered performance.

Hester Collyer

This actor had the gift of stillness allowing what she was thinking to be seen by the audience. From the moment we saw her preparing for her suicide attempt to the end of the play she did not slip out of character for an instant. Perhaps her very tight control could have been loosened just a little when she fell into deep despair at the end of Act 2. A heart-rending howl would have had us all out of our seats to comfort her!

Sir William Collyer

This actor was very much the judge in appearance and demeanour. His diction was confident and clear and his manner was of someone who is used to being listened to. For someone who has perhaps sensed an opportunity to get his wife back we didn't see any change in his demeanour, but he moved round the stage well and stayed in character.

Freddie Page

A very confident performance showing the irresponsibility, selfishness and self-absorption we had learned of before his first appearance. Apart from his hurried diction, referred to above, this was a thoughtful and enjoyable portrayal of someone who as a fighter pilot had genuinely reached the 'highs' and was now only left with the 'lows' of life.

Philip

Only we who had read the script were expecting a younger man. However, this actor played the part with great sympathy and was believable. He had an excellent delivery and his discomfiture as being the messenger was so well displayed.

Anne

This is such a difficult role to play – never on the stage long enough to become established, the script indicates a naïve character needing to be sheltered from life. We felt this actor had managed the difficult task of being sympathetic but at the same time wanting to keep tabs on her husband. The innuendo re his past indiscretion was nicely injected. Her off-stage presence was flawless.

Mr. Miller

At the time the play was written there must have been many Mr Millers, and this actor caught the essence of his part very well. He was formal, professional and sympathetic and the revelation of his day job was delivered with some pride. His final scene with Hester was touching. We saw a really enjoyable performance.

Jackie Jackson

It is so difficult to judge how to play 'an ass' convincingly and although perhaps this performance was just a little over-the-top it none-the-less served to make us squirm in sympathy for this poor friend of Freddie's. The characterisation was secure and confident.

Endeavour, Originality and Achievement

We were transported back to the 1950s as soon as the programme was put into our hands and we were directed to the Lyons' Tea Room, with accompanying musicians,

where one could enjoy a glass of wine after changing cash into the appropriate currency before moving on to the beautifully mounted exhibition of the 1950s years and of Rattigan's work and life. This undoubtedly added a sense of excitement to the evening, and the whole team is to be congratulated. Thank you for asking us back, and for your excellent hospitality.

Coral Pepper Dip RSA – Joint Moderating Adjudicator, Plays
John Harrison – Adjudicator