

**'The Deep Blue Sea' by Terence Rattigan**  
**Cannon Downs Drama Group**  
**Director: John Frankland**

**As seen by Kathy West on 19<sup>th</sup> October 2013**

This group always make an extra effort Front of House, and this year there was quite a treat awaiting us. A pre-show exhibition of memories and memorabilia from World War 2, an exterior view of the setting of the play, and a live band playing in a replica 1950s Lyons teashop. We even needed to buy ration coupons with which to buy our tea and cakes, and our programme was in the form of a ration book. It is really exciting when groups strive to extend the theatrical experience beyond the stage, as in this case.

The play was staged on the floor of the hall with the audience on 3 sides, and entrances and exits were made around and through the audience. The set was simple, with a window to the street stage right, fireplace stage left, and doors to bedroom, kitchen and the other flats up stage. There was ample room for a chaise, chair, and telephone and drinks tables, without the set appearing cluttered.

Hester appeared before the curtain, calmly preparing for her 'suicide', before turning on the gas. We not only heard the hiss of the gas, but also experienced the smell, which was somewhat alarming! I'm not sure how this was achieved but it was very impressive.

The actors and audience were in very close proximity and for the most part, this worked well as we felt the claustrophobia of Hester's world. Being so close allowed the audience to really see and experience Hester's thoughts, but it worked less well with some of the characters who appeared less naturalistic. At times the proximity made some movement seem excessive, for example, Mrs Elton rapidly walking between Mr and Mrs Welch in Act 1, and Lord Collyer's pacing about when he first arrived at the flat. The long entrances made by actors through the audience could have been distracting, but it is to the onstage actors' credit that they were not, so engrossed were we by the action on stage. This long exit allowed us to fully witness Hester's distress when Freddie left her and this was a particularly heart-rending moment. There were some good silences between Hester and Freddie in the final scene, and I liked the way they were frequently placed at opposite sides of the stage in their scenes together.

Sound and lighting were appropriate. The extra-loud sound effects which intruded into Hester's consciousness were deliberately jarring and gave the play an edgy atmosphere. It was a shame that we did not hear the hiss of the gas at the end of the play, just before Hester decided that she could live after all, and decided to light the gas, as this would perhaps have applied a nice symmetry between the introduction and the conclusion of the play.

Costumes and make up seemed appropriate to the period. Props also seemed authentic, although Freddie's suitcase (collected by Mr Welch) seemed too small, and Hester needed more clothes to pack at the end. The need for cigarettes in a period play like this was well-handled, with characters handling them well without ever actually smoking them.

This was a very engaging and thoroughly entertaining production, from a Director and a Company who are never afraid to do something different. Thank you very much for inviting us.

## Individual Performances

### Hester Collyer

This was an extremely engaging and sympathetic performance. This actress was rarely off stage but stayed in character throughout and was utterly believable. Projection (even in her quieter moments) and diction were excellent. Had some long periods alone on stage but handled these well. Her weariness and distress were very genuine, and contrasted well with her remembrance of falling in love with Freddie on the terrace at Sunningdale, which she recited with charming delight. Created very believable relationships with Freddie and Bill, and her final scene with Mr Miller was very touching.

### Mrs Elton

This actress brought great energy and humour to this part, and cut across the pace very nicely each time she came on. At times I felt she was in danger of slipping into caricature, but I think this was mainly because we were so close to the action, and other performances were directed in a much more naturalistic way; on a proscenium stage this would not have been the case. Projection and accent were excellent.

### Philip Welch

A charming performance. An excellent period portrayal of a middle class man of that time, caught up in events he would rather not be part of, and struggling to express himself. His obviously difficult relationship with his wife seemed very genuine.

### Ann Welch

This actress elicited real sympathy in Act 2, after her somewhat severe demeanour in Act 1. Although a relatively small part, skilful acting and writing combined to present us with a complete and complex character.

### Mr Miller

An excellent portrayal of the somewhat persecuted ex-doctor. He displayed an accepting, slightly weary wisdom which suited the character well. His final speech to Hester was delivered simply and was very moving.

### William Collyer

This could so easily be an unsympathetic character, so it is to the credit of both the actor and the playwright that he came across in such a sympathetic way. The pacing around in his first scene was perhaps a little unnecessary, as this actor would have been able to convey his feelings well without it. His love for his wife and weary acceptance of her inability to return his feelings seemed very authentic and was quite heart-breaking.

### Freddie Page

I have only previously seen this actor play the hero, so it was nice to see him play a 'bounder' for once! Had a nice casual disregard of everyone around him and was obviously extremely comfortable in his surroundings, whilst being uncomfortable in his own skin. At times I was unable to catch all of his dialogue because of the speed at which it was delivered, which was a shame, but his accent and laissez-faire attitude were excellent. His final scene with Hester revealed a different, softer, regretful side to his character, and it was therefore difficult to lay too much blame at Freddie's door, which I suspect was the Playwright's intention; an excellent change of tone.

### Jackie Jackson

Despite being a relatively small part, this was a memorable performance. His discomfort at the situation he was in was very clear for all to see. Because we were so close, he could perhaps have got away with outwardly showing less obvious agitation physically; his excellent use of voice let us know exactly how he felt.