

National Operatic & Dramatic Association

Report



Society : The Richings Players

Production : Abigail's Party by Mike Leigh

Date : 10th May 2006

Venue : Iver Village Hall

Report by : Stephen Jarrett area rep 11A

An overview

Mike Leigh is my favourite - first introduced to him in the 1980's when I saw Abigail's Part on stage, 'Grown Ups'; which is my favourite, 'Nuts in May' and all the television plays, or films, which have made him one of Britain's best playwrights, and especially his unique way of Directing, where in Grown Ups, he left the cast for a week, to live the lives of the characters, with no scripts, just plot, story and hours of the cast talking about their roles', then appears with cameras and films it.

Expectations

This play is all about control, Beverley controls Laurence, Tony controls Angela, Abigail controls Sue and then as the play unfolds the control is taken or passed on until the climax where the "weakest" character, Angela actually controls the last scene alone.

Although this is a comedy, there aren't any punch lines; it is all situational based comedy which mostly comes from the agony of how each character in a differing relationship, deals with current situation.

Beverley is the, "Look what I've got" housewife who wants status and acknowledgement as the centre of attention at all times. Laurence the workaholic, who focuses so much on his clients that he neglects himself.

Angela, who is apparently out of touch with reality, is clearly a very professional nurse and Tony, who we all wonder how he ever met, married and stayed with Angela, as he is clearly in an unhappy marriage. Sue who is lacking in self-esteem and confidence, after a messy and painful divorce, is trying to bring up a difficult teenager.

Front of house

I love the idea of tables at the back for the interval when you have room to do it. We watched from here and it was the most comfortable I have ever been! You must repeat this! If you have a small audience why not put them at tables with nibbles and drinks - which you sell for a huge profit and give the audience a special evening's experience.

So on the Tuesdays, Wednesdays and possibly Thursday, have four to six rows of seats at the front and behind them, tables of 4 -6 facing the front and maybe with food and drinks on - which they pay extra for. It would give the feel of a sell out and bigger crowd whilst making you a few extra quid. Suddenly 50 people would like 200 sitting at tables!

Programme

Lovely programme again!

Setting and Staging

Good set and stage - reversed from how it is seen in the film but worked really well - lovely props very authentic.

Costumes

Wonderful costumes which just brought the memories flooding back of steak houses with prawn cocktails and Black Forrest Gateau's! Now there's a thought - you could have even served food at the tables and had some traditional 1970's grub and Blue Nun wine! Again extra money!

Sound and Lights

Good sound and lights and lovely music throughout.

Direction

Excellent stage direction and characters but I did feel you could have built the tension and pace more as we headed to the 'moments' in each scene. We, the audience must be in agony from the tension felt by each of the characters at the various stages. As we went towards these moments, we never once really felt the extreme of the agony.

Tony never really got cross enough or abrupt enough with Angela. Laurence didn't build enough to the several moments of frustration and anger he had with Beverly even up to the heart attack. And Sue should have been far more affected by the party going at her house.

This is nit picking because you did this play really well and I am only talking about that last 5 that would have got you an A* instead of a B+.

Cast Notes

Linda Bainbridge was very good as Beverley, and gave us a controlled performance throughout; I just felt as though she could have controlled the attack and pace more and even slowed things down in one or two scenes just before the 'moments'.

But overall a very strong and well delivered part. We also needed more from the relationship between her and Laurence played by Warren Palmer, who let us feel the frustrations of being an estate agent and the pressure of being on call all the time, and in parts the pain of being married to Bev, but there should have been even more facial expression and acting off to give a deeper showing of the anxiety he was feeling. The build up to the heart attack should have started earlier and been more obvious to us, but not the cast!

My favourite - played by Joe Gibbs, as we got a fully rounded and complete interpretation, was Angela! Her performance from entrance to curtain was wonderful and her timing and the way she got slowly drunk and then took control at the end was terrific. A top performance by a top actress who really got to the nub of this character and is probably a Mike Leigh fan!

Michael Lucas's performance as Tony was also good and very well under played, but he never showed us enough of the anger and annoyance to Angela - it was there, but just not enough for me.

Sue played by Angela Strach gave us a lovely performance and we felt her anxiety and stress and this huge lack of self-esteem and confidence - again I felt we could have some more.

In summary and conclusion

This was a very good play and very well acted and my comments are, as I have already said, nit picky - looking for that extra 5.

Since I saw Dangerous Corner - which was brilliant. Jewel of Atlantis which I didn't like so much, you have grown as a society and improved - the quality of your productions is improving each time and so I must stretch and challenge you with my comments, as you deserve it for all the hard work you have put into this show. Well done!

Thank you

Stephen Jarrett