

Alfie

Huntingdon Drama Club

Commemoration Hall, Huntingdon

Saturday 1st April 2017

We attended Alfie at the Commemoration Hall on HDC's final night of the play and also their final night in this venue whilst it undergoes some much needed refurbishment. The club clearly has a large, loyal following and Saturday appeared to be a full house. Alfie is a play which is very much of its time and doesn't always sit well with modern day audiences, so kudos to HDC for being bold and brave in taking on such a challenging choice of material.

Director Dean Laccohee began with an unusual opening, a muted, almost mechanical dance number by the female members of the company staring at the audience, expressionless, almost lifeless whilst their male counterparts looked on. One may assume this was to contribute to unnerving the audience from the outset or perhaps to depict the women of the play as the pawns or puppets of the men in 1960s London.

The first scene introduced Alfie played by Adam Hillier and Siddie played by Hayley Kendall. Alfie, we learn, is sleeping with numerous women, including Siddie, a married woman. The artistic decision to perform behind a flat with no amplification sadly made hearing the actors rather difficult. Hayley, however, had strong presence and diction so it was a shame her role was so small. The lighting was also a little distracting in this scene and the same lighting continued throughout the play. Orange, pink and blue lights on the back wall throughout made little sense artistically especially in subsequent scenes inside Alfie's house and in the sanatorium.

Adam Hillier as Alfie coped admirably with his vast amount of lines and his accent was consistent throughout. One might expect Alfie to appear endearing, especially during his numerous fourth wall breaks, but he isn't. Alfie is a selfish, unpleasant, insensitive character and Adam did a commendable job with such a challenging role.

Playing second fiddle to Siddie is Gilda. Gilda dressed appropriately drab in browns gets pregnant by Alfie. Alfie is self-centred, egotistical and unhelpful at the news of the pregnancy. Gilda is cared for by Humphrey although his love is unrequited. Sarah Cornforth as Gilda and Andy Wilkes as Humphrey shared a very sweet scene where Gilda sits on the edge of the stage throwing bread at the audience's feet as though feeding the ducks.

The scene changes were beautifully choreographed and executed throughout by the members of the cast. A swift scene change to the sanatorium found Alfie in bed opposite another patient, Harry. The minimalist set worked well in the small space and how delightful to see Chris Thompson as Harry (I last saw Chris as Buttons in Cinderella). Harry is visited by his shy wife Lilly, played by Vicky Spurway. Harry and Lilly share a tender chemistry onstage and portray an innocent, sincere relationship. The pace and comedic elements also picked up in this scene thanks to the great delivery, timing and diction of Les Roberts as Joe.

In the next scene we meet Annie played by Jennie Osbourne. Annie has travelled to London from Sheffield with Lofty played by Phil Green. Lofty has his eye on Annie but she too falls under the curse of Alfie. The scene with Annie scrubbing the floor on her hands and knees whilst Alfie addresses the audience referring to her as "it" was particularly unpleasant, but again this is the play, not HDC. Alfie breaks up with Annie accusing her of making him "blown up" and "ponsified" on Lancashire hotpot and steak and kidney pie. During this time the philanderer is also seeing Ruby played by Josephine Hussey. Josephine had been playing a doctor in a previous

scene and it may have been nice to have seen some of the other ladies in the cast better utilised as for a time one assumed Alfie had taken up with his former medic.

Alfie has a one-night stand with Lilly, Harry's wife from the sanatorium. Lilly gets pregnant. Alfie arranges for a doctor to come round to terminate the pregnancy. This was a very cold scene. In the 1960s termination after 28 days was a crime and the doctor played by Harrison Lake makes this fact creepily clear. Harrison was unusually young casting for the doctor and played him with just a hint of psychopath.

Alfie decides he wants to be with Ruby after all but gets his comeuppance when he finds Ruby and Lofty have been seeing each other.

There are no happy endings here, I left the theatre sad for those Alfie had used and abused but cold toward Bill Naughton's play. I recognise, as a child of the 1980s that I may be of the wrong generation to look back on the misogyny and sexual stereotypes in Alfie with humour as those around me were. Many of the scenes in Naughton's 1960s kitchen sink realism play made me feel uncomfortable and thankful for having grown up long after that era.

HDC should be congratulated for their flawless scene changes and excellent accents throughout the piece. The evening certainly belongs to Adam Hillier as Alfie, however there were some strong performances from Hayley Kendall and Jennie Osbourne in the smaller roles, it's just unfortunate that they were so brief.

I look forward to seeing HDC's production of Shakers in July.