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**Written Adjudication – Cambridge Drama Festival 2017**

**'Alfie' (excerpts) by Bill Naughton**

**performed by**

**Huntingdon Drama Club**

**Thursday 27<sup>th</sup> April 2017**

## **Introduction**

The Irish-born, British-bred Bill Naughton (1910-1992) was a key figure in post-war English literature, one of the earliest of the kitchen sink school of writers that included the likes of John Osborne, Shelagh Delaney and Arnold Wesker, and he was an incredibly prolific producer of everything from short stories to screenplays to diaries.

The ultimate amoral "swinger", Alfie swaggers and philosophises his way through a parade of women in 1960's London, allowing the audience to eavesdrop as he goes.

## **Challenges**

The main challenge of this piece is to find coherence in the swathes of text and dialogue which has been cut out of the original script. Will there be any semblance of the tone and intent which Naughton wanted and shaped so cleverly, or will the meaning of the piece be lost?

Multi location settings move this piece along and clever dressing and imaginative design will place us where we need to be.

The central character of Alfie is surely a tour de force for any actor, and one who drives the pace of the piece. Certain of his lines, and the script well-studied, this part could be the making - or breaking - of this play.

## Stage presentation

### Set

The play opened to Sixties music which was perfectly appropriate. The use of music sets the time and place well. The sound effects of the car horn and the beating of drums made way for a good transition into music. Keeping Alfie in the spot centre stage, was the right decision as he is very much the central character both in the lives of the women he meets and his own! The zoned lighting delineated well between Gilda's living room, Alfie's apartment and external settings of scenes, and this gave the actors clear acting areas and helped the audience place where the scenes were taking place. No confusion or muddle as to where we supposed to be.

I would suggest for speed of transitions that you could zone the different areas, for example keep Alfie's spot DSC, however put his flat USL and Gilda's flat USR. Alfie could then walk easily between the different scenes.

### Costume

Alfie's suit was well chosen and he looked every inch the East London lothario. The tie was suitably thin, making it a definite 60's accessory, rather than the thick ties of the 70's, and the actor wore the suit well; he looked comfortable in it. You could have gone a little further with the shoes – maybe winklepickers?

The choice of costume for Siddie was also excellent. The red top, the pencil skirt and vibrant yellow jacket. The only note I would make would be to use 60's underwear, or as near as you can get it; it certainly gave the women in that decade a very definite shape, almost like the conical version which Madonna wore (I'm not suggesting you go as far as that!) At the end of the piece, her flowered dress and gorgeous white sunglasses, gave the impression of her carefree lifestyle, which was so appropriate.

Humphrey, when compared with Alfie, looked rather ordinary and this was perfect for the character. The choice gave us the impression of a working man, not a spiv. An honest and hard-working bus inspector, devoted to Gilda.

Lily, the married woman, had a great hairstyle for the time, a coat and a tartan scarf, a rust coloured sweater and she carried a black and white spotted bag. These were all highly individual costumes and Lily was no exception; she made a good contrast to the other women.

Annie wore a grey polo neck, a grey skirt and an apron. This colour selection and style gave the impression of subservience and made for a dowdy and

downtrodden character, which poor Annie is. A similar symbolism was given in Gilda's brown costume.

Smith, with his 'Mac' and burgundy waistcoat, looked every inch the unscrupulous "medical" practitioner. The mackintosh tied tight round his body, giving the impression of secrecy and "covering up" something underneath.

### Sound and Lighting

The lighting, as I said, was designed well. The use of the central spot for Alfie and the zoned areas for other locations, worked well in this piece.

The sound effects were well chosen and executed. I would look at the volume level of the radio at the beginning and take it down a notch or two once the actors start speaking. It did tend to drown them out a little, and these are actors who can project.

The closing song was perfect. In fact, I would have been disappointed if Cilla Black's version of 'Alfie' was not used to close the show.

### Production

This production was directed by Dean Laccohee.

The primary responsibility of a director lies in the interpretation of the text, which then informs their many decisions, artistically and practically. This, in turn, will affect the overall success of the production.

The ensemble playing and commitment of the cast was total and of a very high standard. The cues were sharp and picked up well. This director and cast had studied the text, working hard to make the relationships believable between all character dynamics.

There were good stage groupings and the cast moved around the stage with ease. There was particularly fine positioning in the Alfie and Annie scene with Alfie seated and Annie kneeling on the floor. Very uncomfortable for the audience but as it should be.

The vocal work was good; diction, enunciation and clarity of speech had all been worked on and this paid off in spades; especially the vocal work off stage between Alfie and Siddie in the "car". This company was not afraid to use pauses and these were used to good effect. When an audience has confidence in a cast's ability to know the script word perfectly, they feel totally safe during the deliberate pauses, and not as if someone has forgotten their lines. We were in safe hands with this company.

Careful about giving Alfie the hands in pockets stance; it can be used a little too much and the animation which would be visible would have benefitted his character.

## **Acting**

### **Alfie – Adam Hillier**

This actor's performance was indeed a tour de force and he firmly established himself as the lead character. He has great stage presence and was definitely the "cheeky chappy". He held his own in the spotlight and had great authority. The variety from confident Alfie to the tender Alfie, talking about his son and when he played with him was marked and well defined. His unease when talking about Smith and Lilly; the depth of feeling when talking about the unborn baby was excellent.

### **Siddie – Hayley Kendall**

This actress looked the part and gave a confident character study. She had a natural ease on stage and gave a good performance, even off stage, during "the car" sequence.

### **Humphrey – Andy Wilkes**

This actor gave a complete contrast in characterisation to Alfie which was essential. He played the loyal, genial character so well and his dismay at being rejected was heartfelt and totally appropriate.

### **Gilda – Sarah Cornforth**

Although portraying the supposedly "Plain Jane" this actress had a lovely spark about her. The variety of expression and humility, her fight back when Alfie dares to propose to take the child away was sensitively done and touching. She had good, clear diction and gave a confident portrayal.

### **Annie – Jennie Osborne**

This actress was a lovely contrast to the others. She had a subservience to Alfie which made us all feel uncomfortable and she handled her role sensitively. Her underlying fear was apparent and her hurt both physically and emotionally was executed well.

### **Lily – Vicky Spurway**

This actress gave an engaging performance. It was a confident character study with great control and grounding. She had a fluidity of movement, she spoke and enunciated her words well and her face showed distinctly the utter despair she felt.

## Smith – Harrison Lake

This actor possessed an impressive stage presence. He gave a considered and sustained characterisation of authority, and a frightful detachment, in a cold, clinical way.

## **Dramatic Achievement**

Dramatic achievement is primarily concerned with communication with the audience. Live theatre, as opposed to film or television should be a shared experience between performers and the audience and this theatre group achieved this well.

This was an energetic and entertaining production. There was good ensemble playing and relationships were drawn out nicely.

The text was studied, and the excerpts well-rehearsed, and the cast obviously enjoyed the experience as much as the audience.

Congratulations, Huntingdon Drama Club!