

John Godber's SHAKERS is a well-known and well-loved play, written as a follow up to the critically acclaimed Bouncers, and introduces the audience to the world of the eponymous 1980's "waitress in a cocktail bar". If you can stop tapping your toes and singing along to the soundtrack for long enough, it is a fabulously fun piece. This is well and truly my era and the songs, the styles and so much that I had forgotten about, transported me back to my childhood and growing up in 1980's Britain.

We were warmly welcomed and offered a rather wonderful authentic cocktail (non-alcoholic of course, I was driving!) complete with maraschino cherries and a Del-Boy umbrella to get us in the '80's mood - a lovely touch! Huntingdon Drama Club have been forced to move from their usual home due to renovation work and so the Assembly Rooms of the town hall was the setting for Shakers bar. This brought challenges in the space that was on offer but HDC did a good job of creating an intimate, comfortable theatre space, with creative lighting from the temporary rig by Laura Harling and good sound (with some great tunes!) from Steph Dickenson.

In her directorial debut Vicky Spurway led the four actors ably through their roles, which were many and varied, as all four girls had to multi-task and play a plethora of characters with a range of emotions. This is not an easy task but each girl was able to switch from one to the other very convincingly, showing us their ability as an actor and leaving us with no doubt whatsoever as to who they were portraying at this time. It can so often become confusing for the audience if these roles are not clear and concise, especially on the occasions where there are no costume changes, but our performers all did a superb job here.

Chloe Fegan-Webb showed great characterisation throughout the piece, whether as Nicki the cocktail waitress or an old darts-playing drunkard in The Red Lion pub. She easily transformed from Essex-accented till girl to sleazy bar guy, party girl to poseur boy in the blink of an eye. However, it was as Nicki told the audience about her Nan in hospital that Chloe's acting skills clearly shone through and we were as moved as she clearly was, with tears welling up in her eyes. Superb acting throughout the play in whatever role she was required to take on, Chloe did a tremendous job.

Hayley Kendall introduced us to Carol, the girl who stayed on at school and went to Polytechnic in order to 'better herself' but now finds herself stuck in a cocktail bar, being asked to wear shorts by the bar owner in order to pull in the customers - not quite what she had hoped for. Hayley was perfectly cast in this role and we truly believed that there was something better out there for Carol. Convincing herself that she is a strong character and this is just a temporary position, Carol's little slip in Act 2 reveals her vulnerability and Hayley managed this as her character beautifully, letting us in for just a second, before regaining her composure and carrying on. There was an audible gasp from the audience as we wondered for a split second whether she had actually fallen over or whether it was in fact scripted! Again, Hayley did a great job in multiple roles and the leather jacket at the beginning of the piece helped us to understand what was happening here for future reference. Hayley, you made a great '80's bloke' and your

monologue, telling us about your hopes and dreams, was delightful - drawing us in and tugging at the heartstrings. A great job throughout - well done.

Sarah Cornforth as Adele took us from cocktail waitress to party girl in the club toilets, from Chelsea Girl shopper to inebriated in a bus station with ease. Some of these characters could have perhaps been explored just a little further and really pushed to the limit, but Sarah ably switched from one to the other and took us on a journey through the piece convincingly. The crimped hair was a great addition to your character and the monologue about your affair with your teacher was poignant and beautiful - well done.

Bronte Beckett gave us the bright and bubbly Mel, who was equally at home in this character as she was portraying over-confident TV exec Willy with his 1980's brick phone or even Russell Grant with his star sign predictions! Some great performances here and again your monologue about your Mum was both moving and funny at the same time - super stuff! Bronte gave us convincing characterisation in whatever role she was portraying and was utterly believable as Mel, drawing us in to her sometimes clumsy role - we so wanted her to get those food orders right! Congratulations Bronte on an excellent performance.

Costumes (Ann Monk and Paula Spalding) and hair & make up were good, appropriate to the time, and I particularly liked the aprons with the Shakers logo on - a nice touch. It was a shame that there were so few props: a bottle or two on the bar, glasses, a mobile phone when needed would have all added to the atmosphere and helped to set the scene for the audience. That said, the actors did a great job of continually miming pouring cocktails, talking on a brick phone or serving the audience with imaginary drinks. Set up as a thrust stage, with the audience on 3 sides in a semi-circle, it appeared to have been directed for a production in the round and there were a great many times when the actors had their backs to us. I don't mind this occasionally where it works for the scene, but this happened so regularly as to become distracting. There was a lot of blocking too, inevitable in a 360 degree space, but this can be avoided with a thrust stage more easily. With such an intimate space, bringing the bar stools right out to the edge of the audience left us craning our necks to see the actors faces, those who were facing us at least, and would perhaps have worked just as well further back towards the bar. However, moving from one's long term home with a fully functioning stage is never easy so all things considered, a job well done.

I left the performance with a smile on my face and the 1980's soundtrack ringing in my ears. Shakers was a fabulously fun piece of theatre - thank you Huntingdon Drama Club for a great evening's entertainment. Ting!

