

HUNTINGDON DRAMA CLUB

TABLE MANNERS...a comedy by Alan Ayckbourn

Directed by **Michael Black** and Produced by **John Morgan**

Friday 12th July 2013 at the Medway Centre

On arrival we were greeted by John Morgan (Producer) who took the time to show us around the Medway Centre, which isn't Huntingdon Drama Club's usual venue. It was clear from John that the centre was not an ideal theatre venue but the group made the best of what they had.

Table Manners is one part of the Norman Conquests trilogy and involves six complex characters whose lives unfold round the dining table 'battle ground' over a weekend in the country home of Annie and her mother (whom the audience never meet). Ayckbourn is the master of relationship comedy and Table Manners is recognised as the funniest in the trilogy of plays.

The story centres around two sisters and a brother, a couple of in-laws and Tom, Annie's well-meaning but passionless love interest. Annie has planned an illicit weekend with her sister Ruth's husband, Norman, and Sarah and Reg have come to look after the mother whilst Annie is away.

The dining room set was designed to look shabby and in need of redecoration but perhaps was a little too sparse. Sound and lighting was good although I know there were difficulties given the inadequacies of the Medway Centre stage.

The joy of the production was entirely in the acting...which was skilful and ably portrayed the complexities of the relationships and especially of the hapless Norman, who is on a mission to make the women in his life happy.

Now, being a woman of a certain age myself, I did feel that the cast were perhaps a little too mature but this was quickly dispelled by the delightful ease of the performances. It would be so tempting to over-act in this situation-style comedy but, thankfully, no one did. The delivery of lines was natural and believable. Each character was clearly defined and their comedic timing was well judged and cleverly executed. For this I thoroughly congratulate the cast and the director Michael Black. Whilst everyone gave a sterling performance I would like to particularly mention Bob Pugh as Norman, who managed to cope with Norman's idiosyncratic personality, which was both eccentric and lovable at the same time, and Mark Hebert as Tom, who was totally believable as a kindly but annoyingly vague and sexually inadequate 'boyfriend' to Annie. Mark has a lightness of touch which gave Tom a reality, which left me believing that we have all met a 'Tom' at some time in our lives.

However, I do have one bit of constructive criticism...occasionally an actor forgets a line, it has happened to the best of us...and what we hope for is that our fellow actors can get us out of trouble. My heart went out to a particular actor who forgot a line and no one was able to fill the silence, which must have felt like hours to them. This happened early in the first scene and again later in the play, which led to the actor having to leave the stage for a moment. As an audience member I would rather hear a solid prompt than feel that horrible discomfort of something going wrong. In an ideal world of course, actors can help each other out, but if this isn't going to happen then use a prompt. However, the cast were experienced enough to stay in character but I'm sure this must have affected the confidence of the actor concerned, however, it did not affect the quality of the performances.

My sincere congratulations to the cast, the director Michael Black, producer John Morgan and the entire crew for a thoroughly entertaining evening and I can genuinely say that I am looking forward to their next offering...Picasso at the Lapin Agile.

Bella Coleman

NODA Representative Region 1