

HAPPY FAMILIES

One cannot fault Huntingdon Drama Club on their play choice this year. Following on from the excellent 'Madness of George 111' and prior to the hilarious 'Outside Edge' comes Sheelagh Stephenson's marvellous 1996 classic 'The Memory of Water': a masterpiece of comic anguish.

This terrific play provides four women with brilliant acting opportunities and two men with wonderfully droll parts. Using a relatively simple set, the society balanced the pathos and the comedy rather beautifully in this much performed play about three sisters meeting on the eve of their mother's funeral. Much of the humour revolves around the differences between them and the different recall they have of the same events.

Director Josephine Hussey, with the luxury of a uniformly strong cast and a clear understanding of the play's themes and nuances, gave us a fascinating reading of this play. Whilst I thought that it lacked pace in the first half of the first half, this was a piece that took off from that moment of bonding where the three sisters collapse in sibling hysteria in moments which bemuse the two men.

Sandra Bernie as Vi was the perfect 'glam mum' remembered by Mary whilst Rae Goodwin as Mary was particularly good in the scenes mourning her lost child and her wasted time with Mike. Paula Spalding as Teresa played drunk very convincingly and her comic timing was of the highest quality especially in the scene with Frank: 'you weren't coming up thirty' 'And you weren't witty and entertaining.'

Sarah Cornforth as Catherine played her scenes of despair and self-delusion, particularly following the Xavier phone call, very touchingly and, again, with a sure sense of timing on lines such as 'I mean, I don't have a problem with men or anything. I love men. I've been to bed with 78 of them.'

Given that this is a showcase for the women, I thought that the male actors were truly outstanding. James Rowe has a real gift for catching the nuances of speech and making things real whilst Andy Wilkes as Frank gained our empathy with his cri-de-Coeur to run a pub not sell things in which he doesn't believe. The truth of this performance made the 'Hannah and her Sisters' exchange so much funnier.

Totally apt set decoration (the overflowing wardrobe was excellent) and lighting enhanced the play further and I admired the costumes, especially the beautiful matching dresses created by Jonathan Clifton. The only slightly off-key choice for me was Teresa's dungarees.

Constructive criticism would involve the aforementioned lack of pace and establishing both the sibling similarities and differences more clearly through gesture, tone and the pick-up of cues. For what it is worth, I also thought an actual window and door would have added comic opportunities and moments. But these were actually small points in an otherwise entertaining and fascinating interpretation of a great play.

Another triumph for HDC and I am only sorry that more people were not present at the matinee to witness a superb performance. Congratulations to all concerned and I look forward to 'Outside Edge.'

Sandra Samwell

NODA District 1 East