

A Bunch Of Amateurs  
Huntingdon Drama Club  
All Saints Church  
16.11.18

As a play that had previously eluded me, I was very much looking forward to seeing the latest production from Huntingdon Drama Club, A Bunch Of Amateurs. Written by Ian Hislop and Nick Newman, it tells the story of amateur theatre group The Stratford Players, who are down on their luck and need a drastic strategy to save them from going under. Enter the larger than life American action hero Jefferson Steel, who will apparently solve all of their problems.

When HDC lost their performance space eighteen months ago, they were forced to think more creatively and have since successfully performed in various interesting settings. This evening was no exception, as they staged their production in All Saints Church, transforming the area beautifully with a proscenium arch and curtains. The production was a sell out and so seats were rather tightly packed, with a raised area for the back rows - and thankfully it was nice and warm in what could have been a chilly church.

As the play unfolds we are introduced to Dorothy (Josephine Hussey), who had a lovely opening monologue. Josephine is a seasoned performer and always gives a reliable interpretation - the audience can relax knowing that she is in control and knows exactly what she is doing - a confident performance, well done. Outstanding in his portrayal of Nigel was Richard Brown, who was an excellent choice for this role and played it to perfection. With fabulous comedy moments and some superb sincere acting too, Richard gave us a wonderful performance and his 'wobbly chin' during a particularly touching scene did not go unnoticed. Liz Barker, playing Lauren Bell, gave us solid performance and Caroline Molony, as Mary Plunkett, was suitably uptight and jittery - however the character who stole the show for me was Denis Dobbins, played brilliantly by James Rowe. James, your physicality and comedic characterisation was spot on for the role, your accent was lovely and well maintained throughout - and you had the audience in stitches (we loved your thoughts on the eye-gauging scene!) whilst still pulling on the heartstrings where required. I also loved your facial expressions whilst reversing the 'limo'! An excellent performance - well done!

I especially enjoyed the burgeoning relationship between Denis and fading Hollywood action hero, Jefferson Steel, who was played with great hilarity by Richard Sockett. Looking every inch the American abroad, with his baseball cap and shades, Richard had the character down to a tee. In moments of over exuberance, the accent tended to get lost a little, but was stable for the most part - and we thoroughly enjoyed your portrayal Richard. Playing his daughter Jessica, was Georgie Bickerdike. Another excellent actor was can seemingly turn her hand with ease to many different roles, Georgie was superb as the disenchanting daughter - with an excellent American accent and great facial play, she captured Jessica's character perfectly and took the audience on her journey to rediscover her wayward father, so that we felt her pain every step of the way. Another great performance, Georgie.

With Vicky Spurway, Jennie Osborne and Michelle Gibson making up the ensemble as the stagehands (but cleverly doubling up as the actual stagehands too) this was a solid cast, with great direction from Dean Laccohee. The script is a gift here and much of the great production is carried by excellent writing - however we are conscious that this is of course a bunch of amateurs performing a play about a bunch of amateurs, and as such could have had a very different outcome! With this in mind, there are so many meaningful lines, scenes that are just a little too close to the truth, monologues delivered with more than a hint of realism and we are all too aware that much of the dialogue rings true for so many amateur societies up and down the land, making this piece all the more poignant.

Where it excelled, in this instance, was in the direction, the casting and the deliverance from our players, superbly backed up by Max Richardson on lighting (some great SFX in the storm scene

and when Jefferson lit his cigar) and Jason Austin on sound, who gave us some wonderful, well thought out incidental music for both scene changes and during the interval. Kirsty Flanagan and Angela Chiment on costume did a particularly great job with Denis' Stratford Players T-shirts and I enjoyed their witticisms - wishing that I could have seen their productions of Rita, Sue and Bob Too, JCS2 (where, according to the back of his T-shirt Denis played both a disciple and the donkey!) and Hamlet The Musical! I am also very much looking forward to Ultimate Finality 5, starring Jefferson Steel, as advertised on the back page of the programme - another great little detail, well thought out.

As a 'play within a play', the actors showed us their professionalism when slipping from their characters in A Bunch Of Amateurs to their King Lear counterparts, where we saw how 'amateur' they could truly be. This was especially evident in Denis, whose poor acting skills and googly eyes made us laugh for all the wrong/right reasons. Again, Nigel stood out here, both for the over the top Shakespearean acting but also for Richard's excellent serious acting skills too.

I have been lucky enough to witness this society growing in confidence with each play that they have produced recently. With A Bunch Of Amateurs, Huntingdon Drama Club have once again proved that they are far from 'a bunch of amateurs' with another truly professional and thoroughly entertaining production, rivalling any society in the area. Congratulations and keep up the good work!