

Review by Lance Bassett – July 2016

Banbury Cross Players' final production for their 2016 season was a 'Theatrical Feast' of three one-act plays served with panache on a bed of hilarity.

The entree was David Tristram's 'Peas', directed by Tara Lacey. This was an hilarious one-act tale of a blind date arranged by a start-up and by the sounds of its very dodgy dating agency.

Daisy, played with some style and comedy genius by Elizabeth Riley, isn't too enamoured with her assigned date Gerry. It turns out he works as a lookalike Chewbacca from Star Wars, a conversation stopper if ever there was one.

Dave Candy as Gerry was again skilled in the art of comic timing and invited Daisy to a Star Wars convention, how could any girl resist?

The play moved at a good pace, featuring many comical moments such as Gerry saying how he loved surfing, Daisy imagining him on a crest of a wave of course, in reality he meant surfing the Net! (You had to be there).

With comedy, timing is everything of course, and these two were masters of their craft. The lighting team also deserved praise as does director Tara Lacey. The set and other 'extras' on stage were all bathed in a drab colourless hinterland bringing forward the two protagonists and ensuring they were the centre of attention. The pub bar set complete with the tea lights was simple but entirely adequate. 'Peas' was an excellent portrayal of the meeting of two strangers and the interplay between them and amateur dramatics at its best.

The main course of this BCP banquet was 'The Extraordinary Revelations of Orca the Goldfish'. A standard one-act and the staple diet for am-dram groups especially for festival entries as it runs the gauntlet up, down and sideways as regards the human condition called marriage.

Directed by Rob Hall, this two-hander had Ray Atkinson as Henry and BCP stalwart Linda Shaw as Alice. Linda has obviously been hiding her acting talent under a bushel of late as I have seen many BCP productions recently yet never seen her on stage before. And act she did in 'Orca'. The gist of the piece is the interplay between a husband and wife who are in a tired relationship which slips slowly into fantasy role playing, occasionally at first and by the end of play full time. Again a simple yet good functioning set, and I particularly liked the team associated with the set changes which were slick and efficient. The flat caps and the general 'workers' look was inspirational. So full marks to Ray & Linda two talented actors with great timing who traded off their lines with pace. I have seen 'Orca' many times but this was one of the best. The goldfish was good too.

The final offering of the evening feast was Harold Pinter's 'Dumb Waiter' directed by Jem Turner, and a change of mood here. Leaving behind the humour of the last two courses for dessert we are transported to a dingy hotel room somewhere in Birmingham to meet Ben & Gus. They have been sent to the City on a mission which we soon discover is to assassinate someone.

Ben, the senior partner is played by Andrew Whiffen. He sits on his bed reading his tabloid newspaper, relating snippets of news to Gus, but immediately we can see through his nerves he is hiding a darker motive.

Mr Whiffen played his part well. I don't know what went wrong with his shoulder holster tonight wearing it like a handbag but apart from that glitch he took his part to heart and made it his own.

Ben though was something of a support act for Roger Riley as Gus who made all the running on the move constantly, striding around the room and frequenting the bathroom. The mystery of why the men were there is enhanced by notes delivered by the Dumb Waiter discovered behind a picture hanging on the wall of the intentionally drab and convincing hotel room set.

The Waiter keeps sending orders for food to the bemusement of the gunmen as the room ceased being a kitchen some years ago. The action builds albeit slowly and the finale is as the audience had by now come to expect anyway. (No spoilers here).

To be honest, after the hilarity of the first two offerings, I thought this play dragged a bit. This is not to detract from highly credible efforts of the two actors who had had us all believing in their huge roles.

However this was the first night of the run and there were a few prompts in all of the plays, but surely this was to be expected with such mammoth parts to learn. Pity the theatre was only half full. I swear half of Banbury doesn't know what they're missing.

So another successful evening's entertainment from BCP. The one thing I did find odd is in the very professional programme, printed in full colour, there was no resume of the plays or notes on when or where the plays were set. Strange that.

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