

## **Banbury Cross Players**

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### **AND THE SECOND REVIEW IS IN**

"an unforgettable theatrical ride"

Death Knell by James Cawood

Banbury Cross Players, The Mill, Banbury, 1st -4th May 2019

The storyline of James Cawood's Death Knell has more twists and turns than a helter-skelter. Set in an isolated former hunting lodge in the Scottish Highlands beware anyone in the audience who fails to concentrate on this fast paced seat edge psychological thriller.

The set designed by Chris Garrett together with John Hicks' lighting plan dovetail beautifully to provide an atmospheric scene on Scottish winter's night, complete with flicking log fire.

Congratulations also to sound maestro Robin Williams who's off stage gravel crunching footsteps and cars driving off added to the mood. The flickering TV set in a side room was also a nice touch.

So, enter Evelyn Roth admirably played by Fiona Mikel. She is half of an unhappy marriage to Henry, a one-hit wonder playwright still trying to replicate his success with an earlier work some twenty years ago.

Andy Parsons plays Henry, and he has his work cut out I can tell you. Not only does his mammoth role have more lines than Clapham Junction but also he has to remember his moves and to keep limping throughout the production. And they say men can't multitask. Andy copes well with this huge undertaking and it would be churlish to point out the few times he looked less than confident with his lines on this the first night of the run.

Fiona Mikel was totally convincing as Evelyn, the less than faithful wife of horrid Henry. She had all our sympathy being married to this flawed man who kept her short of money and was a bit of a control freak, but then she was responsible for the poor guy's limp.

The couple await the arrival of Henry's latest muse, Jack Willoughby, a young actor he had seen at the Royal Court theatre and wanted for a role in his new play.

To say all is not as it seems is putting it mildly for Death Knell. Without giving away the plot, which would be unfair, it's sufficient to say I wouldn't want to play the author at chess.

Steve Ramsden played Jack and a more professional performance could not have been expected. He had us as putty in his hands. His nervous and excited demeanour when introduced to his theatrical hero Henry metamorphosed into a totally different Jack as his story unfolds.

The second act finds Met policeman DCI Lazan on the trail of a reputed serial killer calling at the lodge having had reports of the murderer being seen in the area. Again we are led

up various dead end garden paths with bodies littering the stage and our understanding of what we think is going on blown apart.

Sam Brassington as DCI Lazan could have a career in the police with his dogged style of questioning of the increasingly infuriated Roths. We again take everything at face value and fall accordingly as Mr Cawood's script takes us on yet another voyage of discovery.

Directed by BCP stalwart Linda Shaw, Death Knell is a cracker of a play and though I wondered momentarily during the first ten minutes of the production where it was all going, pretty soon it was shut the doors, ring the bell and hold on tight for an unforgettable theatrical ride. Catch it if you can.

Lance Bassett

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