

Ghosts

by Henrik Ibsen

Banbury Cross Players

The Mill, Banbury

10th-13th July 2019

The final production of BCP's 2019 season was Henrik Ibsen's Ghosts, directed by John McCormick.

This cracker of a play opens on a functional and simple set designed by Richard Ashby, all very Nordic I thought. There is also little action in this work, it mainly consists of a series of two hander conversations within the cast of five.

The action opens with Regina Engstrand reluctantly admitting her father into the house on a dark and stormy night where she works as companion, maid. gopher whatever.

Her father seemed a rather unpleasant sort at first, threatening and coarse, but Regina has no truck with him when he demands she leaves her job and work for him in his new 'sailor's mission' he intends to open.

Katy Roberts coasted along as Regina but came into her own later in the production when she has an animated altercation with her employer Helen Alving.

Enter Pastor Manders. The good Pastor was played by Phillip Croxson, and although his performance was a tad stilted in parts early in the play, I was most impressed with the delivery of his lines, of which there must have been thousands and the lack of prompts on this the first night of the run.

I must insert a small criticism here regarding the bad weather constantly mentioned in the plot, but never seen. When a character enters shaking his coat and umbrella saying how wet it is outside, to have a bone dry coat and broolly rather seems to suspend belief.

I digress. Hilary Beaton gave a most impressive performance as the widow Helen, head of the house and whose husband had apparently been a bit of a lad in the past. When his son Oswald takes a shine to Regina it's revealed he was also her father. Oh dear.

Ben Harwood gave a masterly and animated performance as the troubled artist Oswald who had come home due to his artistic block and now not getting much help from Helen, who is all over him like a rash much to his chagrin.

The Pastor and Helen plan to open an orphanage in her dead husband's name but that dream ends when it is destroyed by fire.

Chief suspect turns out to be Regina's father Jacob (remember him) played by Anthony Collier who revealed in his scene with the Pastor a delightful sense of comedy timing. A wonderful piece of dialogue from Ibsen and superbly delivered by Mr Collier. Move over Al Murray, there's a new comic in town.

Shame the theatre was less than half full, the good people of Banbury missed a most enjoyable production from Mr McCormick and team. As a play 'Ghosts' has everything, a good story, comedy, tragedy and no shortage of surprises. A fitting end to BCP's drama season which has featured an eclectic choice of plays for 2019, roll on 2020.

Lance Bassett

July, 2019.