

## **The Woman Who Cooked Her Husband by Debbie Isitt**

Banbury Cross Players

Mill Arts Centre, Banbury

24th-27th November 2021

How good it was to witness Banbury Cross Players returning to live theatre after a year of Zoom productions.

How fortunate we were to witness their come-back play *The Woman Who Cooked Her Husband* by Debbie Isitt and how entertaining it was.

Never having heard of the play I entered the auditorium with a blank sheet as it were, no idea what to expect. Fascinated by the ageing teddy boys and girls who roamed the auditorium their costumes attending to detail, the sheet remained blank as the production started and three pretty young bobby socked girls leapt out and danced in unison to Elvis Presley songs. Wow, this is my era I thought what next?

The audience gasped as Elvis Presley himself came on stage in front of the glitter curtain (a tribute to the set designer Chris Garrett) and not only sang the King's anthems with gusto, but also threw in a few one liners to keep us amused in case we took him seriously. I don't think there was much chance of that but congratulations to David Smith who will no doubt be adding his name to the list of Presley tribute acts available for weddings and hen parties around Banbury

After this came a 15 minute comfort break, perhaps this was a nod to some of the elderly folk in the audience as there was no further intervals.. Strange though, my blank sheet not getting any fuller, what is this play all about?

I needn't have worried. The action starts now with the story of Hilary and Kenneth who have been married for nineteen years. They have drifted apart and Kenneth is having an affair with Laura, a much younger version of womanhood, who makes Kenneth feel as though he is still the rocker he was in the 1950s.

The play, is performed in a series of flashbacks starting with the anniversary dinner at Hilary's house celebrating Kenneth and Laura's three year marriage and ending with a scene where Hilary serves the first course to her 'starving' ex-husband with devastating results.

The plot is simple, a tale of Kenneth's reluctance to age and his wish to remain a teddy boy indefinitely.

The Set is minimalistic and graced with period wallpaper. Where on earth would you find that?

During her marriage Hilary has transformed into the dedicated homemaker. Cleanliness and tidiness throughout, especially in the kitchen, and superb meals served the minute 'starving' Kenneth returned home from work, (I wonder what he did for a living?)

It is an uncomplicated tale which took a long time to tell it but that didn't detract from the absolute creativity put in by director Chrissie Garrett. To deliver this play in the format it was presumably written beggars belief and would surely tax West End professionals in its interpretation. First class honours to all involved in particular lighting man John Hicks who was kept on his toes with credit also going to Costume maestro Jane Shanahan and Hair Stylist Kim Nicholls.

I wasn't completely convinced with the fourth wall sink shenanigans and the imaginary bottles and glasses plus the Liverpool accents fluctuated in parts but you can't have everything can you?

Andy Parsons as Kenneth drove the pace throughout with a confident and enthusiastic performance. An award should indeed go to his hair, genuine '50s styling, Tony Curtis at the front and DA at the back all held together with a bucket full of Brylcreem, oh yes I remember it well.

All three parts in this play are huge. Andy didn't put a foot wrong as far as I could see. He really did come over as the frustrated rocker who wants to stay in the past and thinks getting a younger wife will keep the magic alive.

Hilary was played to perfection by BCP stalwart Linda Shaw. Tragic and funny, Linda never faltered throughout her mammoth role but did show a hard side to Hilary's nature with fantasies of what she'd like to do to her errant husband. Remind me not to upset her!

Then there was Laura. Used by Kenneth, the rotter, just to keep him young, she was doomed when the novelty had worn off and Kenneth twigged that Laura's housekeeping habits were far from that of his previous spouse.

Zara Walton as Laura completed a trio of superb acting talent appreciated by the 80+ audience throughout this commendable production.

Lance Bassett, November 2021.

