

Things I Know To Be True by Andrew Bovell Banbury Cross Players, 12-15th July 2023

Banbury Cross Players have put on some powerful productions over the years, but their offering of Things I Know To Be True by Andrew Bovell has to be up there on the leader board for a storyline and acting that grabbed the audience wrung it out and tossed it back exhausted into the auditorium after two superb hours of theatre.

The play is set round the Price family, parents Bob and Fran, and their four children Mark, Pip, Ben & Rosie. It is a tale of love, overbearing parents and sibling support over the period of a year.

Directed by Chrissie Garrett, Things I Know To Be True starts conventionally enough with a young Imogen Tredwell as Rosie, returning from a European trip devastated by a failed brief affair in Berlin. Her ten minute monologue at the start of the play is impressive to say the least. The speech was delivered seemingly word perfect and with much conviction. She thought she had found Mister Right but he left her heartbroken and much out of pocket. The Cad.

The simple set was designed by Chris Garrett to represent the Prices' garden and the passing of the seasons. Dominated by a huge branch across the rear of the set, it brought a whole new meaning to the phrase 'Taking a 'bough' on stage(!) Then there was Bob's shed and blocks moved round and used to denote items of furniture and kitchen units, though the pretence of using invisible props didn't quite work.

Bob had taken early retirement from his job in an Oxford car factory and his wife, Fran, still worked as a nurse. All he had was his garden to occupy him so he took a keen interest in his family who during the course of the drama all moved away to break free from his domineering ways.

Bob, played by BCP regular Andrew Whiffin, I thought was a little docile in the first Act but Wow! I take it back. Andrew was obviously keeping his powder dry because in Act 2 he burst forth into a cavalcade of human emotions, anger, pathos, love, happiness, even violence. Excellent performance, Sir.

His wife Fran (Janice Lake) spent most of the play in her Nurses' uniform. She certainly looked the part to the point I made a note to have a word with her afterwards about my back. Her rollercoaster relationship with Bob revealed many aspects of their fairly hum drum marriage, including her near affair with a patient some time ago. Still they stuck together for the sake of their children it would seem. Again a very worthy performance from Janice and credit to the wardrobe for the attention to detail on her uniform.

Mr Bovell's script covered a plethora of family predicaments which many of us could identify with but Mark's problem was fairly unique in that he wanted to become a woman, like you do.

Zac Lacey-Rousou played Mark. the debate with his family over his impending sex change was presented with feeling and pace. He was off to Edinburgh to kick start the process and Rosie was also heading to Aberdeen to take a creative writing course. So Fran and Bob watch as their children move miles away and this is after married daughter Pip had left her husband and children to work in Vancouver for a year. Pip (Almira Brion) was no slouch when it came to giving her reasons as to why she was off to faraway places. Job opportunity. Yeah right, we all knew there was a man involved somewhere and we were right.

Now Ben was the younger brother. Played by Will Healey, he was the successful one with the suited office job and the brand new £70,000 Tesla car he'd bought. Again Will drifted on and off the stage but he knew he was biding his time and sure enough, again in the second Act, his hour came. It turns out Ben had been a naught boy and his money had come from cheating his employer. As the wheels fell off his career and with the threat of gaol, Ben's life fell apart. The scene that followed was truly inspiring with Ben centre stage and the family engaged in the crisis with Fran offering her life savings to Ben to help save him from prosecution.

The language is a tad ripe in parts but to be fair we were warned beforehand. The final scene is tragic so to avoid spoiling any future audience I'll just say this play is another BCP howling success. Congratulations to all involved.

Lance Bassett