

## Things I Know to be True

Banbury Cross Players' production of Andrew Bovell's *Things I Know To Be True*, directed by Chrissie Garrett, was a powerful, emotionally raw piece of theatre, and the cast are to be congratulated on their performances.

The play covers a year in the lives and times of the not-quite-perfect Price family - Fran and Bob and their four adult children - as they struggle to find out what things they know to be true amongst the lies and half-truths they usually present to one another (and even themselves). It is very much an ensemble piece and each actor inhabited their characters securely: there were no 'passengers' in this production, and I did not detect any fluffed lines or prompts at all.

The audience must feel that they are watching a close-knit family, and the physical familiarity and comfort that the cast showed for one another made this aspect of the play very believable: a hand on a shoulder here, a touch, or maybe a hug, there.

Janice Lake played the part of Fran securely and believably. A nurse for 30 years, overworked, overwhelmed, overtired, not letting her four children flee the nest, and having to cope with a too-early retired husband, Fran is a complex character, and Janice brought out these aspects well, from her over-smothering love for and worry about her children, and her favouritism towards Ben and away from Pip, to her lack of sympathy (or even understanding) for Mark and Pip in particular.

Andrew Whiffin, another BCP stalwart, gave depth to Bob's character. On the face of it Bob is very innocent and naive in some ways, and desperate to help others, even when they don't want it, usually concerning heating up Fran's meals for his children. Andrew played Bob with a slight sense of confusion (as Fran says, "if he gets dementia I'm not looking after him"), yet his emotional range was huge, going from desperate grief at Mark's move to Edinburgh to a full-blown fist fight and tirade of swearing at Ben's misdemeanours.

An unusual aspect of Bovell's script, all four children have long monologues to cover important parts of their stories, and these were all carried off very securely and three-dimensionally. Imogen Tredwell as Rosie, the youngest, was superb. Imogen has been in many recent productions, and this character was fresh and unlike her previous ones. Rosie both starts and ends (well, nearly) the play with monologues, both very emotional in their own way, and Imogen handled these very well. She was assured and it was clear how strong a character Rosie is ("the cleverest of us all", according to Mark) and Imogen showed her to be very much in control, but vulnerable at the same time.

Will Healey, the only cast member making their BCP debut, gave a powerful performance as Ben, Fran's 'Mummy's Boy' (still getting his shirts washed by her!), who was frenetic, always energetic, driving fast expensive cars and trying to leave his past behind (this last point is potentially true of all the siblings). When Ben is on drugs ("what haven't I taken?") his acting was frenzied and seemingly out of control (though clearly not). It was emotionally difficult to watch, yet one couldn't look away, and the audience did not lose all sympathy for him. A strong debut, and I hope we see more of Will in future BCP productions.

Zac Lacey-Rousou, as the older son Mark, played his part very sensitively and generally more calmly and in a more measured way than some characters. His scene of revelation to his family, his packing scene with Rosie and his monologue about leaving for Edinburgh to start, literally, a new life, were powerful and yet held back. Zac's final appearance was (without giving too much away) completely natural in that the change was noticeable but not an issue in any way.

Finally, Almira Brion played the oldest sibling Pip, stuck in an unhappy marriage and yearning for something else (preferably away from her stifling mother). Almira portrayed Pip strongly, particularly in her interactions with Fran. I particularly liked her reading out her letter to her mother, whilst Janice was on the other side of the stage physically reading it. This was just one example of good use of the stage and connection at a distance.

As with many of Chrissie's productions, the set was minimal, with just a tree branch, a shed, a standard rose which cleverly showed the passing of the seasons, and a number of blocks for use as seats, tables etc. Although the programme stated that the production would not be as physical as Frantic Assembly's had been, there was a great deal of physicality and interaction among the cast, with four people talking at once at one point, perhaps reminiscent to anyone who has grown up in a large family!

The lighting was effective, both in its use of colour and in the pools of light for monologues and the final 'tetralogue'. The soundscape was fitting too, with quiet music at scene changes to show the passage of time, and of course the Leonard Cohen mentioned in the play.

Some audience members I spoke to did not particularly like the play itself, but pretty much everyone agreed that the production and performances were first class. "Stunning" and "powerful" were words I heard mentioned. One thing I know to be true is that BCP can still pull at an audience's heartstrings.

**Review by Jo Genesis**