

Out of Order Review by Lance Bassett

“Out of Order” is the second production in Banbury Cross Players’ 2021/2022 season and is a typical Ray Cooney farce. Much of Mr Cooney’s work could be the same script but with just a change of title. Having said that I love them, and BCP’s adaptation of this comedy is up to their usual high standard and very funny.

The scenario is pure Cooney, a Tory Minister books himself and his hope-to-be mistress into the Westminster Hotel, just across the road from Parliament, on the night he is supposed to be attending an all night sitting in the Commons, supporting the Prime Minister. The script, written in 1990, has been updated to a night in September 2021 and Boris Johnson is the PM. So, off we go. Things are just hotting up for our MP, Richard Willey, when of course catastrophe strikes and his evening and possibly his career lies in tatters.

The MP is played by Simon Hook, an excellent choice as he had the convincing looks of a typical Tory politician and he savours the forthcoming night of delight with the lovely Jane (Katy Roberts) who is secretary to a Labour official.

The plot got off to a flying start and Katy held the first scene together well running around scantily clothed looking for her lost dress, opening and closing doors, appearing where she shouldn’t. You know the sort of thing.

Disaster hits in the form of a Private Detective hired by Jane’s husband to find out what is going on between Willey and his wife, if you’ll pardon the expression. Suffice to say, the detective (Suchit Kulkarni), scuppers the plans of Mr Willey by being found supposedly dead half way through the hotels room’s window, and Richard calls his PPS, George Pigden, to get him out of this mess.

George Pigden is played by Justin Clinch and very good he was too. Confidence and enthusiasm runneth over Mr Clinch and his performance throughout was first-rate, it very much added to the enjoyment of the evening. George tries to help his boss but naturally makes matters worse by carrying out Willey’s panic stricken orders.

Meanwhile the Hotel manager went from fawning over Richard Willey at the start of the play to ordering him out of the building eventually. Heward Simpson as the Hotel manager delivered his part well as his frustrated what-the-devil-is-going-on-in-my-hotel character. He did have his work cut out trying to keep order, not least through the hysterical interruptions of the maid played so perfectly by Marilyn Fairbairn but also by the shenanigans of Philip Fine as the self-serving waiter who as expected gave his usual Oscar winning performance.

The story continued apace with Richard’s wife Pamela (Deborah Watson) and Jane’s (remember her?) husband Ronnie (Adrian McGlynn) appearing on the scene to complicate the plot even more. Ronnie is threatening to sort out whoever is with his wife. Poor Ronnie is fed all types of stories and fake news in an effort to throw him off the scent.

Now the centre piece of the set is the sash window, leading to the balcony and other suites on the same floor. The window had such a bearing on the action I was surprised to find it not mentioned in the credits. There were more entrances and exits through this portal than the doors, the frame coming down on many a cast member throughout.

A running story woven into "Out of Order" is that George Pigden's mother is bed bound and worried about him being late home. Imogen Tredwell played her nurse Gladys who just as soon as she appears on stage is drawn into the plot and very nearly George's bedroom which is now occupied by Willey's wife Pamela.

Overall the normal convoluted scenario from Ray Cooney but one pulled off with style by BCP. This was the first night of the run and I was impressed by the seemingly word perfect performances of the cast, so important with the difficult genre of farce where so much depends on split second timing and pace.

Directed by Terry Gallager, BCP brought "Out of Order" to life, reminiscent of the Whitehall Farces put on by Brian Rix many years ago.

The hotel room set, designed by Peter Bloor and his team, was well thought out with little touches such as fire signs and guest exit routes making it all the more real.

Another winner from BCP with the professional touch we have come to expect, a credit to Amateur Dramatics.

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