

The Wychwood Players

Those of us who have loyally supported the Wychwood Players since its inception a decade ago were full of enthusiasm and pride after the run of *The Winslow Boy* by Terence Rattigan the last three days of March.

Ably directed by Dudley Thompson, the 11-member cast gave a flawless performance. The prompter could have knitted an Afghan in her spare time and the lighting expert, wounded by a recalcitrant ladder on opening night, had only calm, smooth sailing on Friday and Saturday.

The cast included seven “regulars”, Zoe Humphrey, John Drew, Emily Lewis, Mark Jessey, Phillip Croxson, Lindsay Kendall and Rob Gorton — all of whom distinguished themselves yet again. The “newcomers”, Tom O’Neill, Amanda Henriques, Thomas White and Charles Keighley added talented performances and a real fillip of interest for the audience.

The play is set in Kensington during the two years before the onset of World War 1. Pat Bannister’s elegant set design and Sue Smith’s period costumes established the mood but it was the beautifully executed performances of the cast that brought urgency and reality to what might have been an irrelevant “period piece.” *The Winslow Boy* explores injustice as a young lad, beautifully played by Tom O’Neill, is accused of theft by the authorities at his naval training academy. His father (John Drew), his feminist sister (Emily Lewis) and their QC (Rob Gorton), conducting the court case against the school, pursue exoneration for the boy to the point of bankrupting the rest of the Winslow family and marring the reputation of “the best advocate” in England.

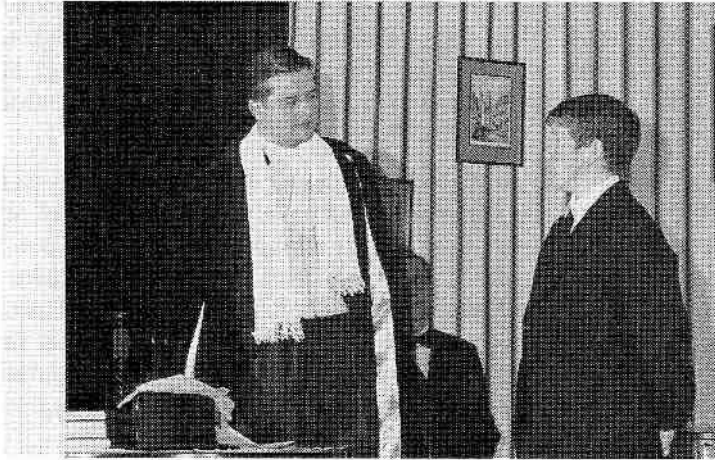
Mrs. Winslow (Amanda Henriques), Dickie Winslow (Thomas White) and, indirectly, the parlourmaid Violet (Zoe Humphrey) stand to lose a comfortable way of life through Arthur Winslow’s obsession. Emily Lewis, who plays Catherine Winslow, loses her fiancé but never her fierce determination to see justice done. The characters of John Weatherstone (Mark Jessey) and Desmond Curry (Phillip Croxson), both suitors of Catherine’s, find their opposing natures exposed by the lengthy legal ordeal. While the pressure builds, Ronnie Winslow is unperturbed. He sleeps the sleep of the righteous, settles well at his new school and is “at the pictures” when the court verdict is announced.

John Drew’s performance as the father, Arthur Winslow, was the best of his career so far. He was calmly and determinedly immovable as he said — “An injustice has been done. I am going to set it right, and there is no sacrifice in the world I am not prepared to make in order to do so”. Part of Arthur Winslow’s sacrifice is his health and the audience saw it deteriorate before their eyes.

Amanda Henriques and Emily Lewis gave strong performances as Grace and Catherine Winslow. One felt the dramatic pull between their familial affection and their philosophical and generational differences.

Rob Gorton offered the audience a new side of his many faceted dramatic ability. QC Sir Robert Morton has risen to the top of the legal profession but, as a man, one felt the intelligent and determined yet very feminine Catherine Winslow could have taught him a thing or two.

Not a dissenting voice was heard about this exceptional production. "All Hail, Wychwood Players. We are your loyal subjects and look forward eagerly to your next effort."



QC Sir Robert Morton (Rob Gorton) confronts Ronnie (Tom O'Neill).



Toasting the successful outcome.