

Theatre Review

Wychwood Players Supper Evening

It is such a luxury when there is enough time to put a Wychwood Players' production on the back burner of one's mind for a time before pontificating about it. I have seen the day when the review was due almost before the final curtain calls. But this time it was different. The June/July issue of *The Wychwood* was full to bursting before the Players' Supper Evenings. A fortnight or so to savour the total experience was perfect timing.



and *Magic* followed the sumptuous dessert course. *Plaster* was a two-hander with veteran WP actors Phillip Croxson and Amanda

Henriques easily inducing the audience to participate in the joys of visiting one's errant husband in totally believable two-bedded Alexander Fleming Ward. Poor Eric; how he suffered from various fractures and wounded pride, and how Helen loved every minute of his discomfort; so much so that she added the final coup de grace before the scene ended. The audience loved it.

You are in Shipton Hospital

£12.50 per person bought the package and, if there was ever a better bargain in the field of body and soul nourishment, I was not invited to attend. The venue was Shipton Hospital, Beaconsfield Ward and visitors (prospective patients?) were met by friendly "doctors, nurses and support staff" when they entered the door. Programmes were proffered, drinks dispensed and the bemused company ushered into a beautifully appointed dining room - quite unlike the commissary of any NHS institution in the land.

The evening was built around four short plays by Richard Harris, together entitled *Visiting Hour*. *Plaster* and *Show-business* preceded the supper and *Going Home*

A Popinjay of a Consultant

Show-business introduced a cast of 11 with staff, visitors, TV crew and patients (one of them definitely moribund) all playing subordinate roles to a popinjay of a consultant surgeon, who was preparing to do a delicate transplant op for the delectation of a TV audience.

John Trevers did enjoy his role. He strutted and swaggered his way across the stage - preening for the camera and the lovely Fiona (Rachel Hartley) from the station, while neglecting to notice that his patient Darbon (Charles Keighley) was becoming increasingly untransplantable.

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The shade of grey on Darbon's face was a masterpiece of the make-up department's art. Anyone who has spent some time in hospital knows this consultant and his entourage. Well, maybe not the TV contingent. Great fun! Rose Hartley, Maureen Sandate, Julie Moore and Gillian Conroy produced a meal that would reduce real hospital patients to grateful tears. It was superb and, at its conclusion there wasn't a grain of rice salad or a dollop of curried mango mayonnaise on one plate at our table of ten. What finer praise?

Marvellous Interpretations

Going Home was a volte-face. No real rollicking laughter in Edith Cavell Ward although there were six cast members – Lizzie Large, Dudley Thompson, Eileen Jessey and Mark Jessey providing comic relief in the cameo roles. Siân O'Neill's Welsh Cheryl and Kate Young's Muslim character, Yasmin, gave nuanced, sensitive performances, which highlighted the melting pot atmosphere of hospital wards. Siân, of course, is Welsh, but Kate most certainly is not Muslim. However an American visitor at Saturday evening's performance was totally convinced by her interpretation of the role and quite surprised to learn that he had been misled by her acting ability.

The Magical Visitor Hour

Magic took place during the evening visitor hour in Nightingale Ward. Rachel Hartley (Brenda) and Barbara Wilson (May) were the patients. John Trevers (Arthur) sat dutifully beside his wife May's bed: Phillip Croxson (Ron) and Joan Hawker (Joan) paid thoughtless, soul-destroying ministrations to Brenda. And all the while poor hapless Jill Collins (Sandra) fed endless coins into a

pay phone trying to contact her illusive boyfriend Barry, who was enjoying a few days of freedom during Sandra's absence. It was hilarious – as long as you weren't Brenda ... or Sandra.

The highlights of the evening were many. Food, of course; stage set (David Trollope); props (Kay Pollard); costumes (Pat Bannister); direction (Dudley Thompson) and the ever-dependable Frank O'Neill's lighting and sound. The actors grow more professional each time we see them. No weak performances and no cringe-making prompts. Memorable moments - John Trevers as the posturing surgeon at the height of his powers and later, as an elderly tremor-beset husband at his wife's bedside; Kate Young's elegant and dignified portrayal of a young Muslim woman. Plaudits must go to Lizzie Large and Jill Collins for their cameo appearances and Rachel Hartley is singled out for special praise. She mastered two distinctly different roles in her first Wychwood Players outing as a young, thrusting, egotistical TV producer and later as a frightened, intimidated patient.

Above all, the atmosphere of the hospital was carried through the entire evening from arrival to departure. It was a delight. MUST we wait until December for more?

Trudy Yates

Editor's note: Trudy has entertained us all with her witty reviews over the last couple of years. She has now decided to hang up her notepad. We would like to thank her for all her efforts on our behalf - I have indeed expected her to 'come up with the goods' overnight at times. She will be a hard act to follow; if anyone feels inclined to step into her shoes please let me know.