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To Malcolm and all at Kingsley Players

Just a very brief note to thank you for entering the
NODA N.W. Drama Festival.

I have enclosed my adjudication of the production and
would just remind you that this is an adjudication just for
the festival and (unless you choose do so yourselves)
will not be published as Peter, will write the usual review
for the website.

Very many thanks again for entering the festival and for
the most warm, friendly and hospitable welcome

It was a highly entertaining evening, very funny and most
enjoyable. Very well done - thank you SO much!

Kind regards

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Chris". The signature is written in black ink and is underlined with a single horizontal line.

Kingsley Players – Pack of Three – 26.2.15

Before I begin the reviews I must thank you for a most entertaining and enjoyable evening of theatre. I will do a brief adjudication for each of the plays, and in terms of the drama festival consider the evening as a whole rather than three individual plays. The adjudications will all be in a similar format and will all begin with a very, very brief synopsis (after all you have been rehearsing for some weeks so it is to be hoped you are fully aware of the story) then some of the challenges that need to be considered. Both the synopsis and challenges are written prior to my attending the production and therefore hopefully give you an idea of what I thought I was coming to see having read the script. As with any review, do please remember as you read it that these are my thoughts on the things I noticed, good and bad, on the one evening that I saw the production, and are almost certainly over-critical specifically to give you 'food for thought' they are written entirely in the hope that they will help and in no way deter you. They are also very much my opinion which of course you may agree with or not but are written as a member of the audience with no connection to the Group. However, whatever follows I must stress that it was a thoroughly enjoyable evening which I enjoyed immensely – which could be to the detriment of the adjudication as I was too busy watching and enjoying to make many notes.

Before I begin on the individual plays just one comment about using a thrust stage, there are many benefits, in that it certainly brings the action to the audience in a most enviable 'up close and personal way'. The potential downside being that, on occasions, members of the audience will miss parts of the action – either because the actor is facing away from them or because another character is standing in front of them and so in effect blocking someone else. So clear and highly structured blocking by the director is vital.

Two Wits to Woo – by John Kelly - Directed by Sandra Capper

Synopsis & Comments: Due to financial constraints the Lady of the Manor is faced with having to dismiss two old retainers in the form of Joe the Gardner and James the Chauffer. Both of whom have been running their own business using estate funds.

Challenges: Good and absolute believable relationships between characters particularly Lady Winsome and the two retainers and the obviously spiky relationship between Joe and James. It would be nice to see some coyness by Lady Winsome during the final phone call with the unseen George.

An open set due (I suspect) to the constraints of the hall but very useable. As it is such an intimate setting I would have preferred to see the red material at the back ironed as it seemed to detract from neat and tidy impression that was created. I assume that the carver chair placed with the back to the central block of the audience was to create the illusion of 'a room' and set a boundary but I think the drinks table would have created that quite effectively.

Props were good – the phone looked the correct period for 1935, although the picture frame on the desk looked a tad modern it did create an excellent picture and impression of a useable working desk. I was at a loss to work out what the speaking tube was, until it was actually used. It did look a little 'out of place'.

Lighting was fairly standard with no requirement for anything complex or out of the ordinary – and the working area was well lit.

Lady Winsome's dress and shoes looked very much the part, and Joe looked exactly as if he had just wandered in from the grounds. I was less convinced about James's costume - I expected at the very least a collar and tie and, if not a chauffer's type jacket then at the very least a green apron. I felt the flat cap to be inappropriate, and the leather gloves seemed to emphasise the omissions.

That said, many congratulations on Joe's costume it was excellent, totally believable and sufficiently dirty.

I was initially very impressed with Lady Winsome's hair but I found it somewhat distracting when a couple of wisps of hair escaped as my reading of the character would be somewhat prim and proper and quite literally 'not a hair out of place'. I would also have expected the lipstick to be considerably redder.

I liked the opening music of 'Love and Marriage which set the tone for the whole evening very well.

The direction was generally good – all the various elements had been drawn together to produce a cohesive whole. The director is also responsible for casting the piece then working with those characters so that they match her vision for the whole play, which was achieved very well. Perhaps Lady Winsome could have been just a little more matriarchal and proper to make her a further step removed from both Joe and James, and perhaps even aged a little – particularly in view of the 'old dear' being mentioned? I would also have liked to see a little more friction between Joe and James but in the main highly appropriate casting.

Pace was generally good – I thought I detected a couple of stumbles but generally a very good pace was maintained.

There were some good groupings but one of the drawbacks of a thrust stage is that not all the audience can see all the action at any one given time and so miss some of the excellent facial expressions displayed by all three members of the cast.

Movement was good – but I did find some of Lady Winsome's 'pacing' movements just a little distracting – and on occasions looking as if there was movement for movements sake rather than for any defined purpose – even if that purpose was only to pace in distress or anxiety. However I must make a special mention of 'the proposal' which was executed and received excellently and was very funny.

Teamwork was excellent – it was obvious that everyone was working well together to produce a piece much greater than the sum of its individual parts, which is very much down to the director, so many congratulations Sandra on a job well done!

The acting was good it required and delivered believable relationships and good facial expressions from all three of you over the entire piece. You were all believable, focussed and compelling to watch and vocally generally good. That said just a few individual comments:

Angela Lucas as Lady Winsome – Quietly spoken and not always easy to hear every word especially when speaking upstage. Lovely characterisation – with some good facial expressions – I particularly liked the 'business' with the proposal. I think you could perhaps have been just a little more 'lady of the manor' but a pleasure to watch.

Malcolm Barker as Joseph – What a simply wonderful characterisation – there really is nothing else that I can say. You were totally believable facially, vocally and characterisation. Liked the relationship with Lady Winsome, but I would have liked to see a little more animosity towards James (but that really is nit-picking!). Just great!

Phil Murray as James – What a wonderful voice you have – I liked the character but somehow you did not quite look the part. Costume can make such a difference! I loved the proposal and you did it SO well – with just the right facial expression and some desperation.

In many ways this has been a really difficult review to write as the bottom line as it were, was that as a whole I thoroughly enjoyed the whole production – I found it absorbing and a joy and a pleasure to watch. My very warmest congratulations to everyone connected in any way with this very funny production, very well done and I wish you all every success in future productions.

The Sneeze by Anton Chekhov – Directed by Lynn Pegler

A wordless pantomime, *The Sneeze*, is set in the audience of a ballet; a senior government official and his wife are seated directly in front of a lower-level official and his wife. The minor event of the underling's sneeze sets off a multitude of misunderstandings—and worse. My first reaction on reading the play was surprise – at a short, funny piece by Chekhov but, apparently as a young medical student he wrote funny and easy to sell stories and sometimes turned to farce in one act plays! Clearly the eminent and sensitive Dr Chekhov has a somewhat unexpected farcical side! Challenges - Obviously the biggest challenge is maintaining interest through a short piece mine with excellent facial expressions so that the audience clearly understand what is going on!

By necessity I have made hardly any notes on this in the belief that due to the type of production it was far more important to watch rather than take notes – so that is exactly what I did!

The set was basic but gave a good representation of a theatre.

As far as I could see, there were no props to speak although I would have liked to see programmes but then they may have detracted from the facial expressions which are so crucial to the success of otherwise of this piece.

Lighting was good and the dimmed lights once 'the performance' started were very effective.

The costumes looked absolutely splendid and really helped the audience to put themselves in a theatre.

Direction by Lynn Pegler, was excellent – I did wonder if setting, what is essentially a mime, on a thrust stage would work but perhaps because of the static nature of the piece certainly from where I was sitting it worked extremely well. The grouping was excellent and I am going to mention the movement in the same section as the head movements in particular were timed to a tee and looked so very effective – what a triumph – well done!

In order to obtain such symmetry, aside no doubt from many rehearsals, you obviously all worked together excellently as a team and the end result was a most entertaining little cameo with many laugh out loud moments. We perhaps would not dare to laugh at the people, but we certainly can and do laugh at the situations.

The casting was excellent particularly the part of Chervyakov, who had such an elastic face and who used it to such great effect. As previously mentioned (but I will mention them again as they were SO good) the head movements whilst 'watching the ballet' were wonderfully planned and executed – many congratulations to everyone. You had obviously knitted the team together wonderfully and had a clear vision of the end result you were trying to achieve; and achieve it you most certainly did; the result was a most entertaining and engaging piece of theatre.

Many congratulations to the entire cast everyone acted and reacted which of course is vital in any form of mime – and you all worked together excellently with the movements – SO well-choreographed! The facial expressions from everyone were very good and we could almost see your thoughts from your expressions. Just a very few individual comments:

Fran Hamer as Storyteller 1 – Beautifully enunciated and clear speech, with just the right touch of something approaching disdain in the voice and setting the tone of the piece excellently.

Chris Newman as Storyteller 2 – Again good clear speech so essential for any form of narration.

Roy Green as Brizshalov – You presented as a very imposing, and therefore very important person. I would have liked to see just a touch more irritation changing to annoyance facially but it is a very minor point.

Lynn Peglar as Brizshalov's Wife – Some lovely facial expressions – and you managed to convey facially that the Chervyakov's were so far below you socially that it was hardly worth getting irritated with them.

Roy Youds as Chervyakov – Such an expressive face and exactly what was required for this part - I loved the panic which was so clear on your face immediately followed The Sneeze.

Joan Barker as Chervyakov's wife – Again very expressive – just be aware how far you turn your head as on a couple of occasions you were looking directly at 'your husband' and (perhaps because of where I was sitting) I missed the facial expression, but again a very minor point.

Congratulations also to Sandra Capper, Sue Elliott, Jo Jo Cleave, Andrea Jones, James Partington and Joe Youds as 'the assembled audience'. There were some lovely and expressive faces but perhaps most importantly every single one of you reacted to what was actually happening

Overall it was a very short and funny little piece which appeared to be enjoyed by everyone and very well done to all concerned for holding the audience well over the whole piece.

Caught on the Hop by David Foxtan Directed by Jo Oultram

Set in Paris, Caught on the Hop is a minor gem of its kind in that it manages to include all the usual elements of farce, contracted into just one act of 40 minutes. No padding out – just the essentials, including deception, infidelity and cross dressing – and all the better and tighter for it.

Challenges: Essentially a farce with all the requirements of farce including excellent pace and the importance of taking the whole thing very seriously. It needs to move quickly so that the audience do not have too much time to think about what has just happened or been said.

I must say at the outset – this really was a minor gem which I and the remainder of the audience sniggered, chuckled and laughed our way through – Thank you so much!

By necessity the set was fairly minimal but looked appropriate – I would have liked to see just a touch of something totally French to set us in Paris – we could have been anywhere in the world and I thought the screen looked a little out-of place.

Props were generally good – I loved the 'suitcase' exactly right, and sufficiently used to make it authentic.

Groupings were generally good, but again take care with unnecessary moves especially on a thrust stage.

Costumes were generally good – although the Porter's suit looked well pressed and certainly not as if it had been slept in. I must however congratulate Joan Barker for the most excellent costumes for Clothilde and Sophie particularly as the piece opened for me they really set the whole piece.

Direction was good – bearing in mind the comments about movements in general on a thrust stage. Pace was generally good but I thought I detected at least one loop and on more than one occasion actors were speaking over each other – I was uncertain if this was due to insecure lines or a Herculean effort to keep the pace going? Having said that pace is SO essential in farce, comic timing is equally important and on a couple of occasions actors were not riding the laughs – which usually means that the audience laughs out loud less so as not to miss anything. It is important during the read through to identify the 'laugh out loud moments' and find some appropriate 'business' for the actors to allow them to ride the laugh for a second or two at least.

There were some good pictures made throughout the whole piece and the Porters collapse onto the chair was handled very well.

I enjoyed so much Clothilde's entrances and exits utilising as they did, the entire playing area – and the initial entrance set the scene and tone so well. I did find myself wondering if there was any way

to put just a couple of steps up to the playing area, which would have added levels and possibly enhanced the entrance for everyone?

You had obviously worked with the entire cast to include both your vision and their comfort zones as everyone looked at ease and quite comfortable and at home with the moves.

I note from the programme that this was your directoral debut and farce is probably the most difficult type of play to begin with! You rose to the challenge wonderfully and I sincerely hope that you were as happy with the results as the audience undoubtedly were.

The acting was very good – with some simply superb portrayals – farce needs to be played just slightly larger than life and you all did that wonderfully. Vocally you were all good with good facial expressions and characterisations. Hence I found myself reluctant to take my eyes away from what you were doing to make any notes because I did not want to miss anything – I can offer no greater compliment than that. Just a couple of individual comments:

Sue Elliott as Clothilde – what a simply superb characterisation – I just loved the counting of the stairs particularly after the third time – there is nothing else to say – just a wonderful portrayal, good vocally and facially expressive.

Andrea Jones as Sophie Fontaineau – You really looked the part – I would have liked to see perhaps a little more anger as befits the Gaelic temperament. Do try to find something to do to enable you to ride laughs more effectively. Good facial expressions.

Joe Youds as Porter – What a great entrance – I totally believed that you had just climbed all those stairs with a heavy suitcase. I liked the slight hesitation on the various names displaying some really good comic timing.

James Partington as Etienne Fontaineau - You displayed some great facial expressions particularly the frustration over the keys – and I loved your initial entrance as Quasimodo. I did struggle to believe your relationship with Esmerelda – but the irritation and acceptance of your wife was well handled.

Jo Jo Gleave – Esmerelda – Always difficult to join an established cast – but you certainly made an entrance – and looked the part. I did struggle to believe your relationship with Etienne, but some lovely facial expression following the dénouement.

Overall a most enjoyable, well directed and well performed piece very much enjoyed and appreciated by the audience.

This is the first time that we have had 3 plays entered into the festival as one entry and I must apologise for some of the repetition that the whole adjudication contains but as I have viewed each piece as an entirety some repetition was inevitable.

Thank you for entering the festival and for making me SO very welcome. This was my first visit to Kingsley Players and I sincerely hope that it will not be my last as I enjoyed some excellent acting and creative direction. I laughed all the way through just what anyone needs on a cold February evening – Thank you so very much!

Christine Hunter Hughes – 26.2.15