



Society : KINGSTON VALE O&DS (KVIDS)
Production : "CALENDAR GIRLS"
Date : 7 February 2013
Venue : Arthur Cotterill Theatre, Kingston
Report by : Stephen Macvicar

Report

Brief Synopsis

Calendar Girls is about the women of a Women's Institute group in North Yorkshire. This Women's Group produces a calendar each year based around scenes of the Yorkshire dales. In 1999, one of the ladies husbands became ill with Leukemia. He would say that if the ladies planted Sunflowers, he'd make sure he'd get better so he could see them. Unfortunately, he didn't pull through and in order to raise funds for Leukemia research the women decided to make an alternative calendar of themselves in the nude hoping to sell a few hundred copies around their villages.

Amateur societies are being afforded a one year window to perform this play and many are taking the opportunity. It was a good choice of production for KVIDS to perform in what is now their 75th year. The Arthur Cotterill Theatre is a nice venue and an ideal playing space for this kind of intimate drama. With the audience relatively close it feels like armchair television, almost like a play for today but it does allow the audience very much to be absorbed into the proceedings.

I liked the set which was clean, open, fresh and very engaging. It gave a little perspective with a garden area behind gauze to create another scene. The gauze proved doubly useful as the backdrop for a series of slides which added realism and context. The village hall contained stage-width flats, which were suitably adorned with a mirror, picture of the Queen and the obligatory noticeboard. The stage furniture included a table, various chairs, a coat rack, plants and the necessary piano. This attention to detail was impressive. The set design and set building team are to be congratulated.

The show opened to the strains of Jerusalem which has been adopted by the WI as their anthem. The ladies are practising their Tai Chi to various levels of enthusiasm and so we were off and running...

The action in the play is performed largely by ladies and it gives a good number of these ladies the chance to perform the roles of real people. There are three roles for men but the ladies have the lion's share of the workload. I had of course seen the film but in many ways the play is more evocative because you are in the middle of the action and living the rollercoaster ride with these ladies. The men too have important roles. The story has been told as a result of the death of a male character through lymphoma in 1998 and whilst this plot turn has its tragic side, it is the humour emoted from this character and those around him that brings the inevitable sadness which follows to the fore. There is often grief in a play but when you realise that this is a true story and these are real people that it brings it all home.

I thought all the ladies were terrific without fail. There was an assortment of characters on stage all fulfilling roles which varied in size. As well as the acting on view there was no shortage of bravery. You might say there was plenty of bare faced cheek. Each lady disrobed behind a variety of accoutrements and fortunately there were no 'mishaps' on the night I attended. A special mention must go to Alice

Rose Rayman whose character had to go just that little bit extra and sit naked on a piano stool with no hiding place.

Congratulations to Katy Goddard for directing such a tight and entertaining production. All characterisations were big but stayed within the realms of plausibility. Technically it was all good and the costumes were altogether appropriate. The play was well produced and stage managed by Philippa Stone and her stage crew. The action flowed smoothly with all cast members appearing to be well rehearsed. I don't really want to mention each performance individually but I would like to applaud several stand-out performances. Amongst the ladies, we were entertained by Jan Smith as the backbone of the piece and we laughed and cried with her. Alice Rose Rayman (Cora), Alison Walters (Annie), Angela Daniel (Jessie), Rachael King (Celia – complete with beehive) and Ruth Cocks (Ruth) were the real 'characters' of the play and each contributed greatly to the mirth in particular. Rachel Marshall (Marie) and Jude Sanderson (Brenda) had straighter roles but the contrast made the action compelling. Other smaller roles were played by Jayne Clark (Lady Cravenshire/Karen), Natalie Grover (Elaine), Sonia DeMonte (Vera) and Debbie Arthur (Rosemary) – all of whom should be proud of their achievements.

Our male participants came in the form of three characters. Rob Malone was a triumph as the fateful John. There were gags aplenty but his rapid decline was full of pathos and I think the shortness of breath in his final scene would have brought a tear to a glass eye. Nick Wale too gave us plenty of comedic moments but also demonstrated his serious side providing support for his family and friends. The much sought after role of the photographer was played by Sam Cunningham and I look forward to seeing him in more stretching roles in the future.

Your A5 programme had some interesting society and show background details which I enjoyed. The biogs were good as were the cast photographs in character. Thank you for the NODA insert.

Judging by this production, it looks like it is onward and upward for KVO DS and in particular the drama section which pleases me very much. This will be a contender for a NODA drama nomination later in the year.

Thank you for inviting me to the Arthur Cotterill Theatre and I look forward to the next production, 'Acorn Antiques'.

I look forward to seeing you very soon.

Kindest Regards

Stephen Macvicar
NODA Rep
London Area 3
steve.macvicar@hotmail.co.uk