

FAWLTY TOWERS - WICKHAM BISHOPS DRAMA GROUP

Performed Saturday April 13, 2013 at Wickham Bishops Village Hall

Director - George Greenham

Performing a stage version of an iconic TV series is always fraught with difficulty because of the risks of unfavorable comparisons with well-known characters. Actually, this turned out not to be an issue at all, partly because the key players were all strong actors and captured sufficient mannerisms to their screen counterparts to avoid concern but mostly because the script and the situations are inherently funny and don't require impressionists to have credibility. That credibility was further aided by the excellent sets and slick technical effects. Telephones, alarms, falling moose heads, exploding fire extinguishers all worked on cue. The scene changes were reasonably quick, the classic music filled in the gaps and having the hoodies rearrange the letters of Fawlty Towers on the off-stage sign was an intriguing and clever idea. There was one noticeable silence in-between the first two episodes and I wasn't sure whether that was a deliberate silence or a discontinuity in the music. Either way, it was noticeable and perhaps could have had another hoodie attack to keep the audience's mind from wandering.

The pace of the dialogue itself was good, with no flagging sections. This was no mean achievement given the need for many of the actors to cope with stairs, in addition to four other exits, in terms of timing their cue lines. The leads became increasingly confident as the night wore on with each episode funnier than the last. Whether this was the script, self-assurance or the reaction to an audience that was warming up throughout the evening, I just don't know. Glenn Massey as Basil Fawlty delivered a really good performance. Although not as manic as John Cleese he produced sarcasm, slapstick and the goose-step with the best of them. His sly asides in response to Sybil were particularly good and his dialogue was fluent. Particular praise is due for his dialogue in the third episode, where the series of non-sequiturs and mood changes, resulting from his being hit on the head earlier in the episode, must have been especially hard to remember and deliver. Linda Burgess, as Sybil, not only looked the part with the perfect Sybil wig but also captured her brusque busyness and her acidity. The relationship between Sybil and Basil was very well done and at times necessarily violent.

Jim Self, as Manuel, was suitably physical, with a good cod Spanish accent and well able to inject chaos whenever called upon to do so. Anne-Marie Latter completed the main quartet as Polly, showing herself able to play a restrained, yet very capable woman. In some ways this is perhaps a frustrating part to play with none of the punch lines and relatively little involvement with the comedy. The remaining parts, of which there were almost twenty, several doubled or even trebled up, were all well cast, the larger role of Mrs Richards being especially well done by Pauline Roast. This was a good evening's entertainment, well produced and directed, with strong production values across the board.

Reviewer - Stewart Adkins

NODA East - Regional representative District 8