

# 'Allo 'Allo

## Wickham Bishops Drama Club

Directed by Michelle Bacon

### Front of House

The hall was decked with red, white and blue balloons. There was bunting draped around and the front of house team were dressed for the occasion. We received a warm welcome, were shown to our seats and offered refreshments for the interval. The programme was of a high standard, with biographies of David Croft and Jeremy Lloyd, writers of the original series and this script, and Gordon Kaye, who played Rene. There were the flags of the various countries, a picture of the famous Fallen Madonna and a Lego model of Gruber's Little Tank! Appropriate French music was played pre-show, setting the atmosphere nicely for the evening ahead.

### Set

This play requires several set changes, sometimes done with parts of the stage being lit individually, but the group decided to have these other scenes set front of curtain. The main set was of Rene's café. To one side was the glass door leading into the café, with a window beside, hung with gingham curtains. A piano was centre stage at the back. There was another door leading into an unseen part of the building and stairs leading upstairs. The wooden bar area was to one side, with a good selection of bottles and a large till. Tables and chairs were set towards the front of the stage. We did feel that the chairs looked far too modern and were not suited to the period. Plain wooden ones would have been better and it would not have mattered if they didn't match.

### Lighting

Good lighting with the stage area well lit. During the evening sequences, the lighting visible through the glass door and the windows was subdued.

### Costumes

Most of the costumes had to be hired, as so many of the characters are in military uniform. Other costumes were appropriate for the period, with hairstyles in 1940s styles. The waitresses were dressed in blouses, skirts and aprons and Edith had some pretty frocks. We did feel that Rene's overcoat looked too modern and the ladies in the café had rather odd hats on – not the right style for WW2.

### Performances

Rene Artois. Graham Pipe

From his first entrance, Graham nailed his character. World weary, philosophical, hen-pecked devious, and randy! His accent was good and maintained throughout and his frequent asides to us, the audience, were well timed and made us feel we were sharing his confidences. A challenging role, to be both actor and narrator but Graham did this with charm and confidence. His panic as the numerous Hitlers arrive was very funny and done well. A most enjoyable performance.

Edith Artois. Pauline Roast

Pauline was a very likeable Edith, perhaps more attractive than she should be! She managed her staff with a suitably bossy manner but was flirtatious and clingy towards Rene. We both felt her singing was not flat enough – it was too good.

Yvette Carte-Blanche. Moira Monti

A wonderfully blousy, flirtatious and over the top performance. Moira looked as though she was thoroughly enjoying herself. She kept her accent mostly throughout the play, but it did waver a little in the final scene. When not part of the main action, Moira busied herself behind the bar, alert to what was going on but doing her jobs. She worked well with Mimi.

Mimi Labonq. Linda Burgess

Mimi is a feisty little character, intent on killing Germans – when she is not sleeping with them! Perhaps Linda could have been slightly more murderous in her attitude, but we liked her amusing facial expressions. She had a good rapport with Yvette.

Monsieur Roger LeClerc. Ashley Saunders

As the doddering, mystery man, Ashley's body language was just right and he made the most of LeClerc's comic moments, lifting his glasses to deliver one of the show's many punchlines.

Colonel Kurt Von Strohm. Roger Lyons

Roger had a good sense of comedy and made the Colonel a likeable buffoon. Although he found the German accent hard to maintain, he created a rounded character that we could relate to. A man who wants to see out the war in a cushy billet.

Captain Alberto Bertorelli. Paul Galbraith

This part is a gift of a role, giving the actor a chance to do not only an outrageously over the top Italian accent but to over act in every scene he is in! Paul didn't disappoint. He was extremely funny as the Italian war hero, who makes mistakes in everything he does. A lovely sense of comic timing. Well done.

Herr Otto Flick. Jack Williams

A controlled performance from Jack, suitably cold hearted and cruel, yet allowing us to glimpse a sense of mischief, especially when with Helga. His accent was good and his speech was clipped. Appearing as the usherette in the cinema scene allowed Jack to show his talent for comedy. He was very funny as he jealously prowled around with his torch.

Private Helga Geerhart. Catherine Stott

As the love interest of Herr Flick, Helga is mostly quite serious and strait laced but Catherine portrayed the sexy side to the character. A good contrast.

Lieutenant Hubert Gruber. Sam Knott

Sam appeared to have studied this role in detail. He captured the eager boyishness of Gruber and his body language was good. He made good use of his facial expressions in his many encounters with Rene, where they were usually talking at cross purposes. However we both felt that trying to

impersonate the original actor, Guy Siner, he restricted himself. We would have liked to see more of Sam's own interpretation of the character, but well done.

General Ludwig Von Schmelling. Ross McTaggart

A thoroughly nasty character, Ross shouted and bullied everyone in his path.

Michelle Dubois. Jane Smith

One of the best known catchphrases belongs to Michelle of the Resistance, who will say this only once! Jane donned a variety of costumes and disguises and had great fun with the role. She was exaggeratingly over cautious, always checking to see who might be listening.

Police Officer Crabtree. James Milne

Another gem of a role for any actor who can master Crabtree's very odd speeches. James played this slightly dim policeman to perfection. Learning the lines must have been quite a challenge and to deliver them completely deadpan, wrings all the humour from them. Tall and lanky, James kept his movements to a minimum, allowing the audience to concentrate on his strangled dialogue. A lovely, droll and understated performance. Well done.

British Airmen. Charlie Willett and Jonathon Pipe

These two popped up, literally, in amusing cameo roles, with suitably posh accents.

Soldiers/ Peasants/Pianist. Len Howard, Jim Self, Suzy Lovett, Nicola Thomas, Sue Matten

While not having many lines, they all contributed to the success of the show, acting and reacting to what was going on around them.

Conclusion.

Audiences love to see something familiar from the television and this show is always a popular choice. People can anticipate some of the funnier lines and catchphrases and enjoy them even more, knowing what is coming.

We liked the jolly accordion music that covered the scene changes but did find that sometimes these took quite a while. With such a large stage, possibly one small corner could have been set as the Colonel's office, and only lit when needed, thus reducing the scenes front of curtain.

The cinema scene worked particularly well, with the suggestion of rows of seats.

Pace was good throughout and all of the actors made the most of their lines.

We did feel that Edith was singing to us, the audience, rather than the patrons in the café. The inflatable Hitler was a particularly good one (I've seen inferior ones in other productions!) The scene where he is being pumped up had tricky sight lines and some people will have seen a ruder version than others!

The characterisations were very good, and mostly close to the original actors.

We both enjoyed the play, as did the very enthusiastic audience. The sense of everyone having had a good evening, was tangible.

We wish the Drama Club every success with their next production. This one will be hard to beat!

Jane Rayner and Anne Sexton