

North Essex Theatre Guild Play Festival 2022/2023

A Fete Worse than Death

Wickham Bishops Drama Club

Directed by Graham Pipe

9th July 2022

Front of House

Pleasant, friendly greeting. We had been given seats in the front row, which were changed to further back when requested. Interval drinks were provided. The programme was impressive, printed in colour. There were individual cast photos, rehearsal pictures and a short bio for each person. As a little bit of fun, they had all named their favourite detectives. The pre-show announcement was clear and concise.

Costumes

A nice selection of outfits to enhance the characters. Malcolm was very dapper in his green shirt and red waistcoat and wife Bunny wore a pretty floral frock, ideal for a summer fete. As the organiser, Trish looked very official in her high vis vest, while Miss Parmenter was dressed like any typical older lady – blouse and skirt with sensible shoes. The funniest costume was the fur coat, tunic, trousers with crossed binding and a twin horned Viking helmet worn by Nigel. Dressed like that, he made the audience laugh before he'd said a line.

Set

All the action takes place in a marquee, so the stage was lined with tent like material, looking very authentic. There was a sign at the back for the beer tent, two tables with cloths and two lovely flower arrangements on stands on each side.

Lighting

There were no changes to the lighting, as the action all takes place during a summer afternoon. The stage was well lit with no shadows.

Performances

Malcolm. Nick Hewes

Malcolm is pompous and loud, full of his own self importance and Nick captured those traits very well. His pride in his large marrow and his horror as a bigger one was wheeled in, showed on his face. There was a lot of posturing and righteous indignation – Malcolm is a cross little man. The bad feeling between him and Trish was very believable. Nick's performance was such that Malcolm wasn't very likable, so his death didn't distress anyone!

Bunny. Michelle Bacon

Michelle had a good rapport with Malcolm but she needed much more expression in her lines. However, her distress in act two was more realistic. You could really feel her grief for Malcolm, tinged with her guilt concerning Nigel.

Nigel. Ross McTaggart

Ross gave Nigel a Welsh accent which added to the humour of this

character. Not only did he look absurd, but he had a simple and slightly apologetic manner. Nigel is passionate about his re-enactments, without realising how comical he is. Ross' body language was good. Nigel is obviously regarded as a bit of a joke by the other villagers, but Ross played the role in a completely straight manner, seeming to ignore any jibes, and showing his boyish enthusiasm.

Trish. Debbie Irby

Trish was a supercilious, bossy and officious woman. Debbie made her very believable! Everyone will have met a similar character at some point. At times she became flirtatious, excited at the arrival of the celebrity actor, but also had a long running feud with Malcolm and the animosity between them was very real. Good timing and body language throughout but especially when she was angry and ranting. Well done.

Miss Parmenter. Sue Warner

This was a very natural performance, warm and funny. Sue portrayed Miss P as slightly dotty initially but once she began to try to solve the murder, she displayed a girlish eagerness. This role could easily have been a copy of the many actresses who've played Miss Marple, but Sue made the part her own. She worked very well with Jenson. Their many exchanges had an easy realism and despite the difference in their ages, we sensed a good connection which made their dialogue both funny and interesting.

Father Mike. James Milne

Not an average village priest, James was sly, rather superior and extremely competitive. His ungodly glee as he brought in his very big marrow was well judged. Some good body language and a very expressive face. He had some one-line injections, delivered deadpan which made them all the more amusing.

Trevor Jenkins. Max Luscombe

Max had a small walk on role as Trevor and we hope he enjoyed the experience, treading the boards.

Ray Martin. Jenson Bacon

Jenson was smiling widely but insincerely and managed to convey that he was bored and embarrassed. He had the looks, the swagger and the ego. Ray is a vain man, and he had a very detached and superior manner. He was cool and calculating and yet he entered eagerly into partnership with Miss Parmenter. A great rapport with Sue Warner. Having repeated many times that he was a mere actor, not a real detective, Jenson was delightfully funny as he questioned the suspects. He took Miss P aside to ask her opinions, like a keen and amused schoolboy. There were so many expressions that flitted across his face, some obvious, some cleverly subtle, and they all told us exactly what he was thinking. Jenson's body language was expressive but really natural, and his speech patterns were just right. Although he is certainly too young to have played a tv detective in hundreds of

shows and many more roles, the quality of this young man's acting was such that it didn't matter. This was a standout performance. Well done!

Conclusion

This was an interesting take on a traditional who done it, as it turned out the murder was a group effort.

The pace was good and each character, stereotypical though they were, gave a believable performance. As Ray Martin, in detective mode was musing about motive and means, there was very good ensemble playing as each cast member reacted to what he was saying. The prop marrows were well made but I was slightly underwhelmed by the cake. I have seen better. I would have liked to believe that Nigel and Bunny had been having a long-standing affair, but it didn't really come across. Perhaps some lingering looks, full of meaning, or small surreptitious gestures. Tricky to achieve but something to aim for if a similar situation happens in another play. Audience members can pick up on that sort of thing and its good if they can suspect something before being told.

Overall, this was a good evening's entertainment, and we wish the group every success with their next production.

Jane Rayner