

Off The Hook

DATE	9th April 2022
SOCIETY	Wickham Bishops Drama Club
VENUE	Wickham Bishops Village Hall
TYPE OF PRODUCTION	Play
DIRECTOR	Jane Smith
WRITTEN BY	Derek Benfield

Report

Author: Katherine Tokley - NODA

Wickham Bishops Drama Club

Off The Hook by Derek

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Directed by Jane Smith

I love a good farce. It takes me back to watching Fawlty Towers with my parents on a Sunday afternoon. With the gaudy bright orange walls of the Hook Hotel reception room, the clever design of the hotel logo and appropriate adornments of fishing rods on the walls, together with the the lacy tablecloth and padded reception desk, it was the perfect setting for a perfect journey into madness.

Catherine Stott, playing Edna, the surly, reluctant and perhaps the most sensible character as the maid provided us almost with breaking down the forth wall, frustrated with the ridiculous goings-on during her shift. She was a great presence on stage, avoiding the chaos and trying never to venture beyond her duties.

Pauline Roast gave us a treat as the naughty Norah Catchpole. With a Barbara Windsor-esque energy and twinkle, light on her toes and with an eye for the gents, her energy was infectious and her garish costumes of leopard print and satin nightgown flowing in her wake really suited her mischievous advances. Her husband Major Catchpole, played with confident stride by Charlie Willett gave us a good dynamic between this mismatched couple. More interested in rounding up pigs than his wife, Willett developed his performance as the play progressed, with great mannerisms reminiscent of his army days, clearly long behind him. His medals proudly displayed on his dressing gown was a great touch.

Baxter, played by Nick Hewes, again came into his own a little later. Clearly walking on the wrong side of the law, with his leather jacket and shadowed stubble, an air of a quick temper about him, once teamed with his companion Charlie Mullins, played by Ross McTaggart, these two really ramped up the action. Charlie, a real Jack-the-lad with Baxter, gave a great performance, manipulating each character as necessary to achieve their goal to find money in a suitcase stashed somewhere in the hotel by a Mr Spook, whom they believe they have sprung from prison.

The most unfortunate Mr Spook, clearly the wrong man, was played with relish by Graham Pipe. He was a wonderful representation of a man clearly in the wrong place, carrying out Charlie and Baxters schemes under duress when all he wants is something to eat. In an ill fitting suit with taped glasses and great physical comedy he was a true pleasure to watch on the stage. These three made a great comedic team, delivering their quick-witted puns and firing lines back and forth in obviously very well rehearsed sequences. Mrs Fletcher-Brewer and her browbeaten daughter Carol joined the action later on, and gave all characters great opportunity for more situations in which their cover may be blown.

Debbie Irby as Mrs Fletcher-Brewer was typically well dressed and with high standards as a Justice of the Peace, however her status did not protect her from the unfolding confusion during the evening scenes after her drawers had been raided!

Her daughter Carol, played by Leigh Perry, strolled into the story in a tartan skirt and Wellington boots, catching the eye of Charlie with reciprocating glances. Carol seemingly did not accept her standing imposed by her overbearing mother and kept her fancy for Charlie hidden from her.

Polly, the girlfriend of the real Mr. Spook and her elderly father, played by James Milne were last to join. James was a great addition playing Mr. Parkinson, standing in for the role at late notice, with a good ear for comic timing, he got the most out of his smaller role. Polly, played by Joanne Greed, also gave us a good performance, with a bit of an edge and slightly weary from caring for her father.

The staging of this production was well thought out. A difficult build, with multiple doors and entrances and exits throughout, as well as staircase, and a lot of room to fill, every part of the set was used to its full potential. Pace picked up as the play progressed; a few puns were swallowed very early on and delivered a little too readily, but as they found their rhythm and settled in, so did the quality of delivery. The evening was a real treat, the audience clearly enjoyed their evening and I would love to see more from this group.