

A Fete Worse Than Death

DATE	9th July 2022
SOCIETY	Wickham Bishops Drama Club
VENUE	Wickham Bishops Village Hall
TYPE OF PRODUCTION	Play
DIRECTOR	Graham Pipe
WRITTEN BY	Richard James

Report

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Wickham Bishops Drama Club

A Fete Worse than Death by Richard James

Wickham Bishops Village Hall

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Directed by Graham Pipe & Assisted by Joanne Greed

It is always a pleasure to visit the friendly Wickham Bishops Drama Club. Everyone in the audience is made to feel welcome by the society's front of house team. In addition to the warm welcome, the tea or coffee and biscuits during the interval was much appreciated.

For their Summer Show they chose a murder mystery/comedy play. The fete committee have asked Actor Ray Martin to open the village fete, playing on his fame as TV's Inspector Brady. Little does he know that ambition, infidelity and "marrow envy" will lead to a murder, which he'll be left to solve - without a script!

As the play began we were greeted with an excellent set made by Alan Roast and Charlie Willett. Here was the inside of a large marquee complete with bunting and two large trestle tables. A couple of substantial hanging baskets were set either side of the door which led out to a country scene. A prominent sign to the beer tent was seen outside the entrance. Props for this production, by Jane Smith were excellent. Both 'Molly' and 'The Leviathan' marrows were superb as were the onions. The pots of jam and chutneys were also displayed; obviously someone had been very busy making these. Costumes were all appropriate for each character and I particularly loved Nigel's Viking costume, with what looked like an old aunt's fur coat which only added to the fun.

Malcolm (Nick Hewes), the new chairman of the village fete, is desperate to win Thornton's Biggest Marrow this year after coming second to Father Mike (James Milne) the year before. Malcolm gets murdered about half-way through Act One. Nick gave us a fussy pompous character with clear speech, so we heard every word he spoke. I really enjoyed his impassioned drooling over his prize marrow, giving no thought to his lonely wife Bunny. I loved his expression when he saw the vicar's giant marrow!!

Bunny (Michelle Bacon) who having come second to a marrow, is now having an affair with historical re-enactor Nigel. Michelle gave us a worn down wife, supporting her husband but longing to be with Nigel. She created good relationships with both men and her tears when Malcolm died seemed very real. Maybe a few less hand gestures would have been useful; less is more sometimes.

Nigel (Ross McTaggart), was in full Viking costume, but he must have been so hot on this very sultry summer night. I know what it's like to wear a fur coat all the way through a play, so well done Ross. I wasn't sure just why he had a Welsh accent for this one but nevertheless he played the role well,

including his repetitive comedy line of 'I'll be in the beer tent'. He perfectly showed his passion for his hobby and for Bunny.

Trish (Debbie Irby) is the officious upset fete organiser who has been passed over for committee chairman. Her outburst in act 2 earned her a round of applause. She was impassioned and tried to take control of every situation.

Father Mike (James Milne) has a natural aptitude for comedy. I always enjoy watching James on stage. He has a natural easy gait as he moves around the stage and I felt he was chosen well by director Graham Pope. I did like the way he delivered his one liners.

Spinster, Miss Parmenter (Sue Walker) has a great fondness for the 'Inspector Brady' television murders and becomes the Miss Marple of the play. She seems to have trouble distinguishing Ray from the TV detective but in the end helps him to solve the crime. This is a fairly large role and Sue did well although sometimes I couldn't hear her very well and she took a few prompts. I understand that some of the cast had had the dreaded Covid and less rehearsal time which is still a problem for many groups. Her character was delightful but I felt she could have given us a little more energy in her performance.

Ray Martin (Jenson Bacon) was the TV detective and here we have an extremely confident actor on stage who epitomised the role really well. I loved the two different characters of star and TV detective. He had obviously worked very hard with the characterisation. This young actor has it in him to do really well and I do hope he continues to learn and experience more on stage work.

Trevor Jenkins (Max Luscombe) had a very small role in this production but was a delight. I do hope he is given more in the next play that you do.

Lighting was fine but there was some shadow upstage. Sound was good and I particularly liked the choice of music for the openings of both acts.

Director Graham Pipe and his assistant Joanne Greed, did well to get this production on. I would have loved to have seen Graham on stage again as he is such an excellent actor but glad to see that he has a talent for directing with Joanne.

Thank you so much for inviting us and we look forward to seeing you next production.

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