

NORTH ESSEX THEATRE GUILD FULL-LENGTH PLAY FESTIVAL 2018-19

Wickham Bishops Drama Club

Restless Spirits

Written and directed by Graham Pipe

Adjudicator: Anne Sexton accompanied by Jane Rayner

13/4/19

FRONT OF HOUSE

We received a very pleasant welcome from the F.O.H. team, thank you for the complimentary drinks! Soft music was playing in the background and then changed into spookily atmospheric pre-curtain music that set the mood for the performance ahead! The programme was clearly presented with some good rehearsal photographs included.

SETTING

This was a well constructed, and envisioned, picturesque room in Victorian style, full of period furniture and props. A large table was dominant, being the main focus of the action. This darkish, red room looked very realistic on the generous stage and served the action well. Stage management and crew, and props, had done a good job! A small point, but the boxes that were brought on could have looked as if they contained something for more realism.

LIGHTING/SOUND

The lighting plot was very atmospheric, supporting the plot very well as the ambiance of the set and play grew dimmer and moodier. Just right!

All the sound effects were on cue, including crashing china and furniture, plus the sound of the telephone. The ringing bell was well contrived and appeared to ring by an unseen hand. Great timing!

COSTUMES

This was a well-thought out collection of costumes, thoughtfully attuned to the different characters, with good use of hair and make-up. We particularly liked Madam Edie's floating outfit and her magnificent wig that made her look very mystical. Well done!

CAST

MADAM EDIE OCHRE

We really loved Pauline Roast's luminosity and her absolute stillness. Her "medium" was very convincing and a joy to watch; her voice had a lovely tone to it. Pauline's "other worldly" performance was mysterious and we could believe that she had psychic powers. Well done!

SYLVIA OCHRE

As Edie's ward, Sylvia was the real medium. Leigh Perry presented a clearly voiced, no-nonsense, amiable character, making her a definite contrast to the mysterious Edie, A good, grounded characterisation.

BIXBY

As the archetypal, "past his sell by date", old retainer, Charlie Willett shuffled across the stage, muttering and swearing as he went! He looked the part exactly in his green apron and yellow rubber gloves! Charlie made a really curmudgeonly character, making the most of his comedic falls and accidents!

CHRISTA EVANS

As one of the cynics this story needed, Debbie Irby gave a confident performance. She gave a believable and deceptive portrayal of a friend who turns into a scheming, murderous woman!

CAROL BLENKINSOP

Catherine Stott played a grieving widow with a sweet, innocent air. We felt her characterisation could have been a little bit stronger at times, but her performance was rather touching.

GEORGE DE VERE

Ross McTaggart gave a solid performance of a greedy, fraudulent banker, showing these characteristics well. Although they bickered and argued constantly, Ross had a good rapport with his stage wife.

ISSABELLE DE VERE

Described as a hormonal, alcoholic, bereaved Mother, Jordan Shynn encompassed all these aspects of her character in her performance. Her body language was very good, you knew that she was a woman with a maelstrom of emotions beneath the surface.

JAMES HOOD

Playing the other main sceptic in the cast, becoming the hero of the plot, Nick Hewer was very believable and confident. He looked very confident on the stage; his acting was natural and contained humour. A very good performance!

PHILIP BROWN-STUART

Presented as a shy, withdrawn man, grieving for his Mother, Stuart Latter's body language was good and his expression sad. When it was revealed that he was a criminal investigator, Stuart's demeanour completely changed thus offering a contrasting characterisation that was very effective.

PRODUCTION

It's always very encouraging to see a group perform a new play. Lots of people feel they have a play or novel in them, but not many have the chance to realise their ambitions. Graham Pipe has done just that and we are sure he enjoyed seeing his characters and dialogue brought to life. We certainly did, although we wondered if his original idea for a one act play was the best one. There was some unnecessary padding; the comedic element of Bixby's ever-increasing disasters seemed at odds with the rest of the play which was more serious in tone. Having said that, the casting of the production was very good and the realistic and mysterious atmosphere needed to make the story work was well created by the director and his team. The production was a real hit with the audience. Thank you for an interesting evening.

Best wishes,
Anne Sexton (Adjudicator)