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Society : Chesham Theatre Company
Production : Private Fears in Public Places
Date : 26th June 2015
Venue : Little Theatre by the Park, Chesham
Report by : Rob Bertwistle (NODA Rep. District 12)

[Show Report](#)

I was very pleased to accept the kind invitation to review **Chesham Theatre Company's** latest production **Private Fears in Public Places** by **Alan Ayckbourn**. This production was directed by **Paul Eckersall** with **Emily Try** as assistant director. I do like the 'Theatre Supper' idea and it does appear to get those much needed bum's on seats!

Many thanks for the very warm welcome I received from co-secretary **Eleanor Phillips** who made me feel very much at home.

As it is probably well known (but still worth mentioning for new readers) I was, on this occasion, standing in for your District Rep. **Judith Watsham** as she is closely involved with CTC.

The Production:

This was a stylish production with many quick-fire scene changes which were achieved seamlessly and unobtrusively with the use of clever lighting and a minimalistic set which was transformed into a variety of different locations in a matter of seconds.

Ayckbourn always manages to conjure up interesting and well defined characters and these were certainly brought vividly to life in this production by the committed and talented cast. This is not one of his most well-known works and CTC must be congratulated for rising to the challenges that putting on this quite logistically complicated piece of theatre must have posed.

The Cast:

The part of **Nicola**, played by **Katy Devine** was a well observed portrayal of a young woman beginning to wonder if her choice of soul mates had been an all-together good decision. Katy used the stage well and her diction and facial expressions were excellent. Her interactions with said soulmate Dan were very believable.

Nick Lansdowne as **Stewart** was very good. This was a very believable portrayal of an Estate Agent keen to make a sale and then later when we discover 'Stewart' watching some rather 'naughty' videos Nick's comic timing and facial expressions were very funny indeed. Again there was good evidence of clear diction and good use of the stage. Try to avoid too many unnecessary hand movements though Nick - you seemed to want to emphasise every statement with an arm gesture.

Ian Slack played Nicola's rather work-shy and less than committed fiancé - **Dan** - with great enthusiasm. There were some lovely comic moments and the characterisation was well observed. Very expressive facial expressions with very clear diction made this an excellent performance. I particularly liked the convincing portrayal of someone 'under the influence' which was achieved without going over the top!

Jonathan Coburn captured the worldly-wise and perceptive barman **Ambrose** to perfection. There were some excellent moments in his interactions with other characters notably with Dan and Charlotte. Again, clear diction and good stage presence were in evidence resulting in a well-rounded and believable performance.

Mary Murray as **Charlotte** the 'plain Jane' Estate Agent with an 'unusual' secret was excellent. This was a very believable performance as Charlotte's more 'racy' alter-ego was gradually revealed to us. There were some really amusing interactions with others characters and, together with some wonderfully subtle facial expressions, this character really came to life. I did feel that when Charlotte's 'secret' was finally revealed and we saw her in a completely different light her costume could have been rather more daring perhaps?

The part of **Imogen** was captured beautifully by **Alexandra Daywan**. She gave the character just the right amount of (very believable) sisterly horror and disgust on discovering her brother (Stewart) watching porn! Some wonderful comic timing together with good facial expressions and clear diction made this a first class performance. The one thing that did puzzle me was why such an attractive young lady would require the services of a dating agency!

The final cast member plays an interesting character due to the fact that the audience never actually see him although they certainly *hear* him. **Tony Savage** was Ambrose's irascible and foul-mouthed father, **Arthur**. This was handled well and I'm sure Tony had fun hurling insults at the long-suffering Charlotte as well as throwing a bowl of soup over her. This was achieved by a swift off stage change of costume. The insults did seem rather dated by today's standards –maybe I'm becoming immune – or getting old!!

The direction as mentioned previously by Paul Eckersall and assisted by Emily Try (both of whom I had the pleasure of meeting in the interval) was sure-footed and inventive. The cast members were obviously well rehearsed in their quick scene changes and some very good characterisations were to be seen – all completely believable and well defined. I think you should be rightly proud of your efforts, Paul - and of course Emily.

The numerous scene changes as already alluded to were slick and well handled and this must also be partly attributable to **Roger Miller's** and **Peter Threadgold's** simple, yet clever, set design. The lighting by **Steve Cherry** was also very effective and enabled the audience to distinguish between the myriad scenes with ease. I particularly liked the subtle yet effective and cleverly executed illusion of a flickering television screen as Stewart was watching his videos.

The sound design by **Charlie Carrington** was particularly effective as it involved some very precise and 'actor-lead' sequences. For example the fast forwarding of the tape had to match the actor's use of the TV remote. Not only had this to be co-ordinated effectively there were numerous other sound cues to be aware of which all seemed to happen at the right moment so - well done!

The varied and interesting array of props assembled by **Judith Watsham** were well handled by the cast and crew and there were no (noticeable) malfunctions.

Costumes by **Helen Salisbury** and company members all appeared to be appropriate and in keeping with the style, period and setting of the piece.

The programme – compiled and designed by **Andrew Murray** was informative and well presented on good quality paper and contained all the usual information associated with a production. The cast biographies, however, were presented in an extremely small type-face which one almost needed a magnifying glass to read in the theatre gloom.

In conclusion, this was a well produced and top notch piece of theatre which kept the thoroughly appreciative audience on the night I attended very much entertained.

May I once again thank everyone associated with the production and wish you every success with your next presentation which I believe is 'Hi-de-Hi!' in November 2015.

With very best wishes,

Rob

Rob Bertwistle

Regional Rep.

District 12

NODA London

