



Society
Production
Date
Venue
Report by

The Chameleons Amateur Dramatic Society
All My Sons
25th September 2009
The Kingsland Hall, East Lane, Wembley
Harvey Kesselman

Report

Considered one of the most significant American dramatists of the 20th Century and in spite of his first play becoming an absolute flop, Arthur Miller went on to write a number of successful plays. The first of these “All My Sons” (1947) was swiftly followed in the same year with “Death of a Salesman”. Many other excellent plays followed. He probably became better known to the wider public when he became the husband of Marilyn Monroe!! “All My Sons” examines the private and public guilt of a man responsible for producing defective airplane parts that resulted in the death of 21 young airmen.

The background music of George Gershwin, chosen for this production suited the period the play that takes place in 1947. The set, showing the back yard of the Keller’s house consisted of two flats one on stage right and the other at the back of the stage, painted to show a background of greenery together with some real foliage, on stage left on a rostrum showed the back of a house built in an early twentieth century style with wooden clapboards. There was a rocking chair on stage right and a two-seater couch just off centre. A tree planted as a memorial to Larry Keller who, as a pilot, went missing three and a half years before the play opens, was placed below the raised stage. The tree appears to have been struck by lightning and perhaps is an omen of what was to follow. **Denis O’Brien** was the next-door neighbour, Doctor Jim Bayliss, who had purchased the house that once belonged to Joe Keller’s erstwhile colleague Steve Deever. Bayliss would really have liked to become a medical researcher but realizes, as there is not that much money in that field, he is forced to become a GP in order to pay his bills. He is a pleasant character and great friends with the Keller’s. Denis’s dialogue was delivered rather on the quiet side and needed a bit more projection. **Robert Spolander** gave an excellent performance as Joe Keller, displaying all the worries and fears that he would be exposed as the person really responsible for supplying the defective cylinder heads used in airplanes, causing them to crash, and that his partner, Steve Deever, was in prison for the crime. Keller had been set free and had gone on to make himself a fortune. He was further worried wondering whether these defective parts had been responsible for the death of his eldest son, Larry, who was reported missing some three and a half years ago. This was a powerful performance and only very slightly marred when his accent occasionally got in the way of his dialogue. Another neighbour Frank Lubey, played by **Ian Byrne**, arrives with a horoscope he has made showing that Larry must still be alive as the day he was supposed to die was in fact his ‘favourable day’, and nothing bad could have happened. This was a pleasing low-key performance from Ian that suited the part. **Janette Hutchinson** was a magnificent Kate Keeler. Although aware of Joe’s guilt, she cannot accept the fact that her son Larry is dead and just waits for his return. Frank’s horoscope only seems to confirm, in her mind, that her son is not dead. Kate is almost paranoid in her belief and becomes furious when anyone tries to tell her the truth. This was a very passionate performance and most believable. The Keller’s younger son, Chris, who had survived the war, has asked Ann Deever, daughter of Steve Deever, back to the house in order to propose marriage. Ann had previously been the fiancée of Larry and the idea of her marrying Chris was unthinkable by Kate, convinced as she was that Larry would return. **Abby Gardner** was delightful and sympathetic as Ann, believing that her father was guilty and siding with Chris in her attempts to persuade Kate that Larry was dead. Showing Kate the last letter that Larry had written to Ann intimating that he was intending to commit suicide because of her father’s imprisonment, perhaps realizing that it was

Chris's own father who had been responsible for the crashes, upsets Kate who gradually realises that Larry would not be coming home. **Jason Kosky** was outstanding as Chris Keller, believing in his father, who he had previously looked up to, and then becoming disillusioned when he finds out the truth. This indeed was a first class performance, full of emotion, changing in his attitude to both his mother and father. The visit of Ann's older brother George who has been visiting his father in Jail, and is now convinced of his father's innocence, only adds to the tragedy of this play. George wants to remove Ann from the Keller household and wants to have nothing more to do with the family. **Chris Mackenzie** as George was indeed acceptable in his role, but perhaps could have been stronger in his portrayal. After all, he had learned his father had not been wholly responsible for the supplying of faulty parts and that Joe Keller had 'got away with it'. Even having been friends with Chris, he felt that marriage between his sister and Chris should not go ahead.

Jim Bayliss's wife Sue, nicely played by **Catherine Waters**, although a 'friend' of the Keller's, had rather an acerbic tongue, was inclined to be spiteful and, in a talk with Ann, tells her that the neighbours all knew Joe was guilty. Their argument would have possibly been more effective if they had not actually faced each other across the stage, but had slightly turned their heads front stage. A rather scatty Lydia Lubey was performed by **Nikki Amory**. Once in love with George, now fully domesticated and content with being a housewife with three children. A nice cameo part. To complete the cast there was young Bert, played in this production by a girl, **Shantel Lee-Tyrassek**. Bert is a little boy who visits the Kellers' back yard to play a game called jail with Joe. He appears only twice in the play and receives a telling off during his second appearance when he mentions the word 'jail' in Kate's presence.

The play ends with Joe Keller's crime being uncovered, Chris's disillusionment with his father, Kate coming to terms with the knowledge that Larry would not be returning and, finally, Joe committing suicide.

Stuart Everett is to be truly congratulated in directing a first class production, certainly the best play I have seen The Chameleons perform. The pace was just right with some first class performances. There are however just a couple of things that could have been improved. Some dialogue could have been slightly clearer i.e. projection, and George Deever's jacket should have fitted Chris better than it did.

Denis O'Brien designed the set which was constructed by the company; Stage Manager was **Steve Angus**; Production Manager, **Robert Spolander**; Sound and Lighting Design was in the capable hands of **John Jetten**; Props, **Kathryn Priest**; Rostrum Hire, **Denis Cater**. Thanks go to **Arlette Kamellard** for looking after us in her usual delightful way.

Finally many congratulations to The Chameleons for a most enjoyable evening.