



Society : The Chameleons Amateur Dramatic Society
Production : Pack of Lies
Date : 23rd September 2011
Venue : Kingsland Hall, United Reformed Church, Wembley
Report by : Harvey Kesselman

Report

In the 1950's, the Cold War between the West and Russia was having a great impact on the relationships between the two sides, spies were being found on both sides of the 'Iron Curtain' and the notorious 'Cambridge Five that included', Burgess, MacLean and Philby followed by Blunt and Caincross were unmasked by M.I.5. The 1960's had not stopped the seeking out of spies in Britain. In Ruislip, a quiet suburb in North West London, lived the Jackson Family comprising Mr. and Mrs. Jackson and their young daughter Julie; there world was about to be turned upside-down when their friends and neighbours, the Kroger's, were about to be unmasked as Russian agents.

Ian Byrne gave a very good performance as Bob Jackson, an amiable man who could not quite understand what was happening around him. His dialogue was mainly fine, except when he was sitting at the table reading the paper, it was held too high and obscured his face completely. As a result his dialogue was not clear. His final speech in which he reports the untimely death of his wife was most moving and came as quite a shock to the audience. This was undoubtedly the best performance I have seen Ian give and showed a great improvement in his acting. **Catherine Waters** gave a very sympathetic performance as Barbara Jackson. Her gradual breakdown was so well done. She was able to change from a happily married woman who finds herself in the midst of an investigation about their two neighbours, who were close friends and who were now being accused of being spies, to an anxious wife worried about the consequences to her and her family. Both she and Bob had been drawn in against their will and have had to agree to let their house be used for the purpose of watching their friends. This came about by a telephone call followed by a visit from a stranger who announced himself as Mr. Stewart, an investigator working for M.I. 5. **Robert Spolander** was a rather mysterious investigator who has invaded the Jackson's normal life with the information that the Kroger's, Jackson's friends, were not quite what they seemed to be. He points out that they, the Kroger's, have never been persuaded to come to a party or just come round for drinks on a Saturday. In order to test this, Barbara tries to invite them over for a Saturday only to be told it was not possible as, according to Helen, every Saturday was already taken up with various unnamed projects, thereby confirming Stewart's statement. Robert was very good as Mr. Stewart, very persuasive, and manages to get the Jackson's to allow him to use their house as a surveillance post. However, there was a problem with some of Robert's dialogue, which, in the main, was very good. He walked around the set far too much, squeezing past a rather large settee on stage right, and occasionally facing upstage affecting the projection of his dialogue. Other than that, he was fine. There was a very good moment when he remained perfectly still in one room listening to a conversation in the lounge between Barbara and Helen Kroger. His explanation to the Jackson's as to why their friends were being watched came about as M.I.5 were aware that Gordon Lonsdale, a known communist agent, visited the Kroger's every Saturday, and they (M.I.5) knew that information was being passed to the Russians.

There was a wonderful performance by **Nikki Amory** as Helen Kroger. Everything she did was just right, the accent was there, the body language terrific and her dialogue was spoken with just the right inflections. It was difficult for Barbara Jackson to believe that the Kroger's were anything but good neighbours. She came over as a very warm character who was constantly visiting the Jackson's house for a chat, offering to shop for them and showing all the nice things one would expect from the friendship she had cultivated with them. Although **Stuart Everett**, as Peter Kroger, did not appear that often, when he did, he made a great impact. His dialogue was clear

and well projected. He had been a rare book dealer and had run a bookshop in London, but was now, apparently, working from home. As it turned out this had been a very useful cover for his activities as he was able to be at home during the day using the time for sending radio messages to Russia. **Lauren Sproule** was Julie, the daughter of the Jackson's. At her first entrance, her dialogue was rather rushed, but she improved as the play progressed. She was a rather stubborn daughter and her mother fussed over her. Once her parents had been made aware of the problem with the Kroger's, they decided not to tell their daughter who was very fond of Helen. She became quite distraught when she realizes that her 'Aunt' Helen is not the kind of person she purports to be.

The two 'secret' agents who are sent by Mr. Stewart to the house so that an eye could be kept on the Kroger's were Thelma, played by **Karen Deehan** and Sally, **Simone Lee-Tyrassek**. Both were fine in their roles although it has to be said that Karen's dialogue was delivered far too quietly and therefore was not heard clearly. Simone had a similar problem but had much less dialogue. I thought the dialogue spoken by Ian and Stuart in which the audience were given an insight into the minds of the two characters, were delivered with great feeling, especially Ian's speech when he tells of his wife's death, and Stuart's that was so well spoken, clear and concise and would serve as a role model for members of many companies.

Despite the confines of the size of the stage, the design of the set was quite clever, the division between the entrance hall, the kitchen and the lounge, with the suggestion that there were two walls separating the hall from the kitchen and lounge. I liked the hint of a staircase stage right, a nice touch. However, there did seem to be a lack of space caused by the size of the rather large settee that took up so much room. Perhaps if the fireplace, had not been there, down stage right, and the settee moved almost against the wall that possibly would have given the illusion of more space. Nevertheless **Denis O'Brien** design was very functional and well constructed by him and members of the company. Stage management combined with the props were under the guidance of **Rachel Edwards** and **Samantha Ings**; Sound and lighting design were the responsibility of **John Jetten** and **Ian Ramsdale**; **Simone Lee-Tyrassek** and **Helen Stevens** were in charge of costumes; **Kathryn Priest** had little to do as prompt; Production Manager was **Robert Spolander** and **Sally Crowley** did a fine job as the Director of a very good enjoyable play.

There were just a couple of things that should have been corrected; when Robert's trilby fell on the floor, it should have been picked up immediately, quite a natural thing to do. Instead it was left lying on the floor whilst dialogue continued. Robert actually trod on it, and it was only then that the hat was picked up, a distraction that should not have occurred. And care should have been taken with the spelling of the author's name on the banner on the wall leading to the theatre his surname being spelt with two oo's, Whitem~~oo~~ore and not Whitmore. In some cases dialogue was not always clearly heard. Actors on stage must make certain their dialogue is heard at the back of the auditorium. It is no use having a conversation on stage using one's ordinary conversational voice. It won't carry. Whether one uses a personal mike or not, projection is of the utmost importance. If one finds one's back is to the audience and has dialogue, more emphasis must be used. It may be an idea if someone, who is not in the play or even associated with it, is called upon to sit at the back of the theatre, perhaps at the dress rehearsal, to make sure dialogue is heard clearly.

This was a most interesting evening that kept the audiences full attention throughout. A very good choice for the company and one of the best productions I have seen them perform. The Chameleons are to be congratulated on their choice of play.