

THE CHAMELEONS AMATEUR DRAMATIC SOCIETY
"CAUGHT IN THE NET"
16 May 2009
United Reform Church, Wembley
Stephen Macvicar

Thank you very much for inviting me to the Chameleons Amateur Dramatic Society's production of Ray Cooney's play "Caught in the Net" last week at the United Reform Church in Wembley. Thanks also to Simon Crowley for making the ticket arrangements and to Arlette Kamellard for her welcome and hospitality on the afternoon itself.

NODA London Magazine Overview

As the show opened to the extremely relevant Love and Marriage theme, the slightly claustrophobic stage of the Kingsland Hall was rather cleverly split depicting two sets in one. What impressed me most about this production was the pace. Preposterous as some of the business was and as hammy as some of the acting was, I thought it was a very entertaining piece of theatre.

Brief Synopsis

In Caught in the Net, Cooney updates the audience on the seventeen years that have passed and how they have affected the bigamous John and his two wives, Barbara and Mary. There is a teenage son and daughter now, who meet in an Internet chat room, get on well and decide to meet up in person. They are intrigued by the similarities between their fathers...

John, of course, is desperate to keep them apart and enlists the help of his best friend, Stanley, who brings along his old Dad, who, for some reason, thinks he's at a hotel in Felixstowe and spends half the play wandering around trying to get his malfunctioning ball-cock sorted out.

All the usual farcical devices are brought to bear including mistaken identity, slamming doors and spot-on timing.

This was my first visit to the Chameleons, covering my esteemed NODA colleague Harvey Kesselman, but hopefully not my last. The relatively humble Kingsland Hall was the venue for the Chameleons sequel to Run For Your Wife performed some two years earlier at the same venue. I hadn't seen either play and decided not to do much research in advance in an attempt to keep my experience fresh from preconceptions.

As the show opened to the extremely relevant Love and Marriage theme, the slightly claustrophobic stage of the Kingsland Hall was rather cleverly split depicting two sets in one. Stage right half was decorated to the taste of Barbara Smith in Streatham and the stage left half to the taste of Mary Smith in Wimbledon. Both homes were decorated and furnished in colours and materials suitable for the present and although there is an internet reference where the youths converse, the play has an overall feel of the late 1970's and early 1980's about it. Perhaps that just my perception of farce. Well done to Stage Manager and Set Designer/Builder – Den O'Brien for a convincing backdrop to the

action.

The early dialogue sets up both family homes and must have been awkward to rehearse as lines moved from one family home to the other and back again almost instantly. This had to be well rehearsed and it was. Rather ominously both sides of the stage had entrances and exits galore, I think I counted eight, at this point I knew what likely to be coming. Within ten minutes, the sparse but enthusiastic audience was laughing at the antics and dialogue performed by the cast.

What impressed me most about this production was the pace. In shows of this nature if the pace in any way flags then the action can be stilted and cumbersome. From this pace will inevitably come the farce and the comedy. I was convinced that your Director Craig Marshall and the cast understood the importance of the pace – well done.

Preposterous as some of the business was and as hammy as some of the acting was, I thought it was a very entertaining piece of theatre. All entrances and exits were employed usefully. The dialogue was sharp and well projected. This heightened the farce and general 'over the top' sensations that were evident throughout the show. Whilst I have said 'over the top' and 'hammy', this is not meant to be derogatory as this genre of comedy demands the action to be manic.

Congratulations to a hard working cast and creative team. In shows of this nature the standard of actor and acting can vary from person to person but I have to say that the standard was very consistent and there were no weak links.

I have written a few individual notes on the lead principals (in order of appearance);

Gavin Smith – Jason Kosky – This was Jason's second time playing Gavin. Jason has a very bright and smiley persona on stage which does him credit

Vicki Smith – Lauren Sproule – Lauren captured the teenage angst at not getting your own way – a strong characterisation

Barbara Smith – Nikki Amory – Nikki has an elegance on stage whilst adding the need to be assertive when required, matched up well with her character Barbara

Mary Smith – Catherine Waters – Catherine's character of Mary was much feistier but then she was locked in rooms fairly frequently in Act Two

John Smith – Robert Spolander – Robert reprieved his role as the bigamist John Smith and we had to dispense with the reality that officially eighteen years had passed. Robert threw himself into the role and kept smiling despite being left in the most ridiculous of predicaments, time and time again

Stanley Gardner – Steve Angus – Steve built up a good rapport with Robert on stage as we had to believe that the hapless Stanley would go through all the lying etc just to help out his mate who has got himself into a pickle. Steve too was recreating his character in this sequel and was a real crowd favourite in his Hawaiian beachwear

Dad – Stuart Everett – Stuart clearly is too young to play a pensioner but he seemed to revel in this chance for some slapstick humour

The souvenir programme had a nice layout and there was a nice mixture of interesting society reading and adverts that will help the coffers. It is really nice to see photographs and especially some short biogs are always very welcome as it shows the relevant experience and growth of performers.

Once again thank you for inviting me to the United Reform Church and best wishes for your future productions.

I look forward to seeing you again if I get a chance and if I can be of any assistance at any time, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Kindest Regards

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