



Society : CYGNET PLAYERS
Production : "THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST"
Date : 26 May 2012
Venue : Jubilee Theatre, Roehampton University
Report by : Stephen Macvicar

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Thank you very much for inviting me to Cygnet Player's production of the Oscar Wilde play "The Importance of Being Earnest" recently at the Jubilee Theatre and thanks also to Helen Bartlett and Katy Goddard for making the necessary ticketing arrangements and to Jonny Clines for greeting me on the night.

Synopsis

Jack Worthing is 'Ernest' in town. He wins Gwendolyn's hand but Gwendolyn declares that she chiefly loves him for his name – Ernest – the name Jack has allotted his non-existent brother whose peccadilloes explain his frequent absences from his country home where lives his pretty ward, Cecily. Meanwhile Cecily has decided to marry rake-hell 'Ernest' and when Algernon presents himself in this guise, she immediately accepts his smitten proposal. However, through some highly improbable coincidences, all is happily resolved.

Shortened Review for the NODA Website and Amateur Stage Magazine

The audience so close it feels like armchair television, almost like play for today but it does allow the audience very much to be absorbed into the proceedings. Through strong characterisations, Cygnets created an atmosphere which had Wilde's taste for extravagance but was well within the bounds of good taste. Fantastic costumes, each one more glamorous than the last added further authenticity to the piece.

The Jubilee Theatre is an ideal venue for this kind of drama. With the audience so close it feels like armchair television, almost like play for today but it does allow the audience very much to be absorbed into the proceedings. However on the night I attended, the gentleman manning the gates didn't even know that there was a show on – additionally shortly into the second half a series of sustained firework explosions reminiscent of 'Last Night at the Proms' erupted seemingly just outside the studio. The cast carried on regardless – incredible! I think a refund from the venue is in order.

I liked the set which was clean, fresh and very white. It gave a perspective of gardens and a genuine feel of money around the place without having anything sumptuous actually on view. Tables, chairs and sofas etc were carried on and off at the end of each scene with a minimum of fuss. Again this moved the scenes from venue to venue efficiently and without heavy furniture etc. The set was framed on a six inch raise which seemed unnecessary to me but that is my only quibble on the whole production.

Congratulations to Olly Medlicott for directing such a tight production. His experience cast were on top form. Olly created an atmosphere which had Wilde's taste for extravagance but was well within the bounds of good taste. The action flowed smoothly with all cast members appearing to be well rehearsed. Cygnets assembled a strong cast for this production. Amongst the ladies we were

entertained by Alison Walters as the charismatic 'Lady Bracknell'. Alison was not quite the battleaxe that Lady Bracknell tends to be played as but indeed gave her more realism as an upper class snob persona with some depth – similar to Lady Catherine from Pride and Prejudice. Her handbag was well worth waiting for! Flo Nash was impressive and brought a calm reassurance to the prissy part of 'Gwendolin Fairfax'. Gwendolin's scene with Cecily was amongst the highlights. The juvenile lead if I may call it that, 'Cecily Cardew' was played by Holly Manning. Cecily is Algernon's ward and is therefore still very naïve but Holly's portrayal convinced that she was keen to learn, especially about boys! Laura Harrison was a comely Miss Prism offering much needed advice. Almost like a favourite aunt – however it was clear that Laura was having to 'age-up' for the role.

Amongst the men, we had two very different male leads but who worked very effectively together. Mark Smith as 'Algernon Moncreiff' was eternally scoffing cucumber sandwiches and strolling around with cocksureness. Mark commanded the stage and delivered his lines with impeccable timing and with an annoying yet impressive accent. Alan Reiss too as 'John Worthing' gave great strength to the part yet appearing vulnerable around Algernon. The interplay between these was excellent and must have been fun to rehearse. Patrick Harrison gave a wily knowledgeable slant to the role of Dr Chasuble. I could envisage Patrick playing many more members of the clergy. The smaller domestic roles of 'Merriman' and 'Lane' were played by Philippa Stone and Oliver Samson respectively with unfussy composure.

Your A5 play programme has now settled into a steady format which is very easy on the eye and well detailed.

Judging by your future productions – its going to be another great year to be a Cygnet Player.

Kindest Regards

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