

Society : Riverside Players
Production : **FAMILY PLANING**
Date : Friday 18th March 2016
Venue : Memorial Hall, Old Windsor
Report by : Gordon Bird, NODA Representative, Area 14



Show Report

I was delighted to be invited by the Players to review Frank Vickery's wonderfully observed comedy entitled "Family Planning". Welsh playwright Frank Vickery has written some thirty plays and I have always enjoyed his shows that I have seen (*A Night on the Tiles, Easy Terms, Bedside Manner*).

This particular play starts with Tracy who is pregnant and trying to find a way of telling her parents, dependable mother and hypochondriac father. It does not help that Gran sees and hears and knows all but the fun really starts when next door neighbour Maisie arrives and several glasses of gin later provides lots of comedy.

The Players production was very well rehearsed with excellent first half pace and with good cue bite throughout. The characters were very well defined and some first rate performances. The well designed and constructed set was ably lit and appropriately furnished.

GRAN (SUSAN BELL)

What a lovely character part to play! Susan was outstanding as the all seeing and all knowing grandmother of Tracy. Considering most of her scenes were talking to herself or shouting at the rest of her household from her upstairs bedroom, she met every cue perfectly. Her characterisation as the "grumpy old woman" was very well observed. Her diction and intonation was spot on. The monologue to the chair was one of the highlights of the evening – delivered exceptionally well. Well done!

TRACY (KAT GREENAWAY)

I have not seen Kat perform before but was very impressed with this young lady's performance as the pregnant Tracy. She looked totally relaxed and the chemistry between her and Bobby, her boyfriend, was exceptionally realistic. The relationship with her parents and her grandmother was also very natural. I particularly liked her "evil glares" afforded to Maisie the morning after the night before.

BOBBY (TOM WELLER)

This was the first time I have seen Tom perform and what a good debut performance. He looked totally comfortable on stage. His relationship with Tracy was very natural, showing his love and caring about her without being at all soppy. His "dimness" about the confusing events was played just right - he could so easily overplay but it was not. His voice was confident, with good pronunciation and pace of line delivery.

ELSIE (TRISH WELLER)

Although I have seen Trish perform in the chorus for the Players on several occasions, it was lovely to see her perform a more prominent role. The mother's part is relatively small but Trish commanded the opening scene with strong presence as the matriarch. Good, clear diction meant I heard every word. Some of your movements looked a little stiff so just be careful and ensure that you have nicely relaxed shoulders that enable your movement to be more fluid. But that is a small point because overall, this was a promising performance by Trish and one that should give you enormous confidence for future roles.

MAISIE (JILL DADY)

In my view this was Jill's best performance to date. She commanded her scenes with good stage presence. Her lines were delivered with wonderful weight. Jill's interaction with Idris was perfect. Some lovely glances to him before drinking a little too much that enabled loosened her inhibitions and making her play towards him. That particular scene was played by all three characters very well indeed, with good movement, vocal pace and characterisation.

JEFFREY (NATHAN BRISTOW)

This part could so easily have been forgotten – just one scene and only one line – but Nathan made the most of it. He reacted competently to all that was going on; shaking or nodding in agreement as fitting to the scene. And his one line was delivered perfectly on cue with clear diction and volume and produced the required laughter. The comedic effect of just sitting, knitting away, was wonderfully performed.

IDRIS (SIMON ARNOLD)

What I like about Simon's characterisation is that you really feel that you know that person. He has a knack of getting under the skin of his characters. This particular character was very well observed, playing Tracy's hypochondriac father, who suffers every known ailment, including "women's problems". He looked a little off colour and was constantly anxious. His opening scene when he overhears a conversation between his daughter and wife where he thinks he has only 8 weeks to live was perfectly produced. Not one word or sound but fantastic facial expressions and a great stage faint at the end of the scene.

DIRECTOR (ALEX TAGGART)

REHEARSAL ASSISTANT (SERENA KELLY)

Alex can be very happy with his directorial debut. It was very well cast, well rehearsed with everyone knowing exactly what they were doing. Characters were well defined and the relationships perfectly believable. The movement was particularly well defined, especially considering the constraints of space you had to work with.

LIGHTING (ROGER LEWISTON)

Lighting the set this set was very well accomplished by Roger as the overall wash ensured that everyone was lit, wherever they were on stage. The lighting plot was well defined, cross fading from the living room to Gran's bedroom. The external lighting of the bedroom window looked appropriate for daytime.

SOUND (MARK HASTINGS)

It is a pleasure coming to Riverside Players when you know that not only has a lot of thought gone into the stage performances but also to all of the technical elements. The music selection set the production perfectly. All of the sound cues were on time and at a well judged level – the thunder clap was perfect.

BACKSTAGE (JOHN PICKLES)

The couple of scene changes were quietly and efficiently observed without upsetting the pace of the production. All of the props appeared to be in the right place and cleared when needed.

COSTUMES AND PROPS (MEMBERS OF THE CAST)

The costumes fitted the 1980s period and thought had been given for change of costume for the following day. The stage furnishings looked entirely appropriate and all were practical to the setting. I would like to have seen liquid in the tea-cups as it was clear that they were unfilled. When cups are empty people tend to hold them very differently and this was very obvious. This is a very small point now, but I was sitting in the front row so was able to see the time on the watch of one of the cast which showed the "real" time rather than nine forty five that was mentioned several times in that scene. Like I say this is an extremely picky point but one to remember for the future. Overall the costumes and personal props were relevant to the period and setting.

MAKEUP

All of the makeup was well applied and I saw all of the facial expressions under the strong lighting.

SET

Once again the set was of a very high quality. The tabs were not used for this production which meant the set was on full view the moment the audience entered the hall. The attention to detail of what could have been a standard box set was well thought out. A corridor out to the stairs and front door was position up stage, the doors out to the kitchen and into the bedroom were functional without blocking any action. It was a great idea to have the bedroom as a higher level to the rest of the stage to indicate a different location. The only slight criticism was that when anyone sat on the sofa blocked the action in the bedroom.

PROGRAMME

The six page coloured programme provided a useful guide to the evening. The biographies were of the characters rather than the actors which made it a little more interesting. The coloured head shots were of a sufficient size and quality that they could be seen very well. A good size font was chosen throughout meaning it was very easy to read.

Overall this was a very well run performance with slick direction and excellent cue pick up by all the cast. Good casting, set and production elements and a well chosen script meant an enjoyable evening that maintained the excellent quality that one comes to expect from this society.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Gordon Bird', written in a cursive style.

Gordon Bird
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