



Society : Riverside Players
Production : Port Out, Starboard Home!
Date : Friday, June 28th 2019
Venue : Old Windsor Memorial Hall
Report by : Des Wilby – Regional Representative (District 3)

Show Report

It was a pleasure to have ‘stepped in’ as a guest reviewer and provide coverage for this production of ‘Port Out, Starboard Home!’ Whilst John Woodward-Roberts is the new District 14 NODA Representative, unfortunately prior commitments prevented him from attending so soon after having been appointed. I shall ensure John receives a copy of this review, however, and am certain he’ll be delighted to introduce himself at your Christmas pantomime.

Thank you to Vicki Arnold for arranging my ticket and to Susan Pickles for the warm welcome, drink and chat on arrival. It was also a pleasure meeting Tom Weller (Chairman) and Richard James (Author) before the performance to gain a better understanding of Riverside Players and this comedy play in particular.

‘Port Out, Starboard Home!’ takes place on a cruise ship, off the coast of Greece, and focuses on a small group passengers and crew. From a mother and her adult son to an overbearing husband and him downtrodden wife this is non-stop fun and entertainment. Add into the mix a rather camp entertainment officer, a Greek barman with an eye for one of the female passengers, and a constant stream of double-entendres and you have all the ingredients for a highly successful play.

Congratulations must first be given to Simon Arnold and Lorna Cottrill who combined as Directors to deliver a first-class production. Riverside Players is fortunate to have a depth of talented members and Simon/Lorna were able to carefully assemble an excellent cast here. There is nowhere to hide in a small cast and those onstage appeared both confident in themselves and well-drilled in their individual characters. Such results don’t come ‘by chance’ or simply through individual talent but from strong direction, attention to detail and much effort throughout the rehearsal schedule.

Alan Payn was fabulous as the opinionated, tactless and completely overbearing Brian. Indeed, within a few minutes of meeting him, his fellow passengers felt nothing short of sympathy towards Jackie, Brian’s long-suffering wife. A highlight of the show, and a particularly satisfying moment for all watching, occurred when Brian was eventually exposed as a liar and fake. I particularly liked Alan’s ‘deadpan’ expression, droll voice and general demeanour which were consistently maintained throughout. This was a terrific role to play and one to look back on with fond memories.

Kay Smith gave an excellent performance as Brian's downtrodden wife Jackie playing the part with the naivety required. Convinced by Brian that she required medication for a myriad of ailments, Kay elicited much sympathy as she simply couldn't, or wouldn't challenge the control Brian had over her. It was great to see the transition in Jackie's character together with total change in personality. I really enjoyed this performance and the transition in character towards the end.

Jill Dady gave a strong performance as Miriam, the anxious mother who'd gone on holiday with her adult son and was desperately keen on finding him a wife. The opportunities for developing this character were interesting to watch – from the relationship with her son (including the revelation he was actually gay) to the growing support for Jackie and contempt for Brian. A well-rounded and considerate performance.

Alex Taggart gave a convincing performance as Stewart, Miriam's son. Weary of his mother's persistent attempts to find him a wife, Stewart was ambivalence at best towards meeting a suitable woman on holiday. Stewart's hesitation, when approached by an attractive actress, was surprising until he revealed he was gay and had no interest in women! Another good part to play with some strong character acting.

Vicki Arnold gave a lovely performance as Amanda – the TV actress with a liking for Stewart. Showing that in her fall from TV stardom no job was too small Amanda was on-board to give a personal appearance. Vicki gave her character an air of class and the relationship with Stewart was both funny and believable.

Simon Arnold was terrific as Wayne, the ship's entertainments officer. Full of energy and enthusiasm Wayne led the passengers through endless exercise classes and competitions. Always ready with an innuendo or joke this was a great part and one Simon appeared to really enjoy. Whilst most passengers accepted Wayne for what he was, homophobic Brian made his feelings clear with repeated snide comments. Unfortunately for him, Brian was too slow to realise that Wayne bettered him on every occasion – great to watch.

Roger Blackman gave a solid performance in what initially appeared to be a minor-speaking role of Alexandro - the ship's Greek barman with an eye for Jackie... Roger maintained a consistent and realistic accent throughout as Alexandro and Jackie left the ship together in a helicopter.

Trish Weller performed in the non-speaking role of Mrs. Havers. Some good body language and facial expression particularly during the belly dancing scene. Gavin Mills, Samantha Somerville and Pamela Walters combined to provide depth to the small cast as additional passengers in various non-speaking roles. All movement onstage was realistic and done with a purpose. Simple things like taking a 'selfie', or talking over a diner menu, were appeared completely natural.

Simon Arnold is to be congratulated for Set Design that was of good quality, clearly identified the location on-board a ship and ultimately provided maximum space on a relatively small stage. Design included a bar, handrail and walkway at rear of stage, and side entrances. Other than that, several bar stools, tables and chairs provided all the props required for the production. The use of a single flat to portray a blue, cloudy sky certainly gave the impression of a warm climate.

I was pleased to see how the set design ensured this production could simply flow and didn't interfere with the pace by adding unnecessary scene changes. As a result, I will happily nominate this set for **NODA's 2020 Shinfield Players Scenic Award** and request that a selection of 10 photos be sent to des.wilby@noda.org.uk

Roger Blackman & Cast took on responsibilities for Set Construction and their time and efforts must also be recognised here.

Tom Weller took on responsibilities as Stage Manager and ensured that the performance ran smoothly with no delays or interferences.

Members of the cast handled their own Costumes and Props which was made easier due to the current day time period. All costumes accurately reflected what you'd expect to see people wearing whilst on holiday or working as part of the crew.

Mark Hastings managed Sound which was of a very high standard with all cast members being clearly audible when required. I particularly noted that the background music playing during the dining scene was just that – background music! Roger Lewiston managed Lighting which again was first-class. As previously mentioned, I liked the subtle change in lighting to reflect the time of day/evening.

Vicki Arnold also took on responsibilities to design the concise Programme for the audience to enjoy reading on arrival. There were some terrific photographs of rehearsals together with great cast and production team biographies. It was also pleasing to see the programme so well supported by advertisers and, of course, the prominent NODA reference.

Once again, congratulations to Riverside Players and all those involved with the production of 'Port Out, Starboard Home!' Overall, this was a flawless production from a very strong cast. Thank you for the hospitality shown and best wishes in your future endeavours.

Des Wilby
Regional Representative
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