



Be inspired by amateur theatre

National Operatic & Dramatic Association London Region

Society : Riverside Players
Production : **Sex and Curry**
Date : Saturday 29th June 2024
Venue : Old Windsor Memorial Hall
Report by : Nick Humby

Show Report

Overall Production Impression

Sex and Curry promises a hilarious comedy play, with its obvious references to two traditional suggestions of how to start the contractions of an overdue baby. It is in the tradition of Seventies and Eighties British comedies like No Sex please we are British and Not now darling where the comedy relies on characters leaping to assumptions, forced to pretend to be things that they are not, and talking at cross-purposes.

Indeed, that generic description perfectly describes the story of Robert Scott's plot for Sex and Curry. The sex and curry have already been consumed as the play starts leaving Hannah pregnant but without a boyfriend, so she sets up her gay flat mate to act as her fiancée to appease her overbearing mother while her neighbour is asked to masquerade as a Vicar, a Doctor and a Millionaire to further complicate the plot. Like so many of those previous comedies and the TV sitcoms of the same time, it all feels a little “laboured” and “overdue” now and while it has amusing “inter-courses” never quite “delivers” to the hilarious billing.

Riverside Players cast of six make the most of the material creating the characters with a competent ease in an episodic short scene structure that wraps up in under two hours and resolves in an everyone lives happily ever after finish. It is a pleasant gently amusing evening with a charming underlying message about true friendships and sibling rivalry.

Cast

The play revolves around the relationship between Hannah and Tristan who share a flat and **Isabelle Walters** and **Simon Arnold** established their relationship well from the first scene. **Arnold** immediately presented as the gay, but not camp, caring flat sharer and **Walters** as the tearful abandoned young woman. Her “I don’t want to talk about it” repeated line was perfectly inflected to tell us she did want to talk about it ! **Arnold** developed as a caring and sensitive man although rather easily manoeuvred into ludicrous situations by the script and we curiously we never felt it was his flat, leaving us feeling it was hers! **Walters** was required to show more emotional range, often dismissed as hormonal, from bitter and resentful daughter to irritated and jealous sister, to suffering, grumpy and contracting woman with only the occasional opportunities for a smile or more positive feeling. Her handling of the pregnancy bump was convincing, gently stroking it, a moment of joyous excitement at a kick, and some of the best moments of physical comedy as she tried to pick things up of the floor. Together their reaction to the fourth wall slide show is wonderful and tells us everything we don’t want to know about the images!

Her parents, Patricia and Chester played by **Pam Walters** and **Roger Blackman** were required to play a series of short scenes, almost walk on, walk off, as they were ushered away out of the door which did not give much opportunity for character development. **Walters** established quickly the overbearing mother figure disapproving of her younger daughter’s life choices, forcing the wedding arrangements through but did at least soften a little on the birth of her granddaughter. **Blackman** had less to work with, usually trailing in her wake as a put-upon hen-pecked husband with barely time to sit down on his visits. He does in moments reveal a fairer, more caring parent .

Alex Taggart is required to play unwillingly a different character on every appearance as Ricky. The friendly neighbour, the confused vicar, the silent Doctor, the lothario millionaire and finally the penniless boyfriend. He plays them all the same, as a chirpy chappie bemused by his neighbours’ antics and stumbling into the next scenario with innocence and confusion.



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Jenny Hazel as the supposedly perfect older sister, Leah does have more opportunity to develop her character. Starting as an obnoxious, superior sister, through duped woman to drunken rejection and finally a heartfelt reconciliation with both her sister and Ricky which neatly ties up the play. Her physicality as a drunk was good as she crawled and flopped across the settee although her slap and attack on Ricky was lame.

Creative team

Director **Glenn O'Mara-Baldwin** ensured that the play zipped along without much time for reflection and got the most from the script and one room set. It felt that we might have benefited from a second room, the kitchen, so we could see the characters shepherded out of the lounge or the steps for the sister to loiter on as she overheard conversations. It worked well when Hannah returned silently to the room and overheard her parents doting over the baby and we saw her smile break.

The lighting by **Jonathan Stacey** and **Kay Smith** illuminated the stage cleanly without any dark spots although we had no sense of the season outside from December to July or time of day. The end of scene black outs were on cue. The Projector light worked effectively. A moth appeared to be fluttering around the stage lights in act 2 which created a distracting shadow! **Mark Hastings** sound used personal mics to amplify voices and sitting stage left by the speakers I found it odd to hear their voices from speakers as opposed from the stage. Occasionally the mic's picked up prop sounds and one mic pack appeared to drop to the floor. The musical underscore between the many scenes was excellent with well-chosen tracks which as far as I could tell reflected the story development.

The set design and construction by **Simon Arnold** and **Roger Blackman** created a practical space for the interactions although the window between the front door and stairs seemed misplaced and would have been better in the back wall. The single sofa furniture limited the blocking with most scenes calling for seated characters and looked a tight fit for 3! The rear bookcase looked empty and unused, and it was unclear what the screen by the bar was concealing.



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Stage management under **Vicki Arnold** and **Jill Dady** was slick and efficient, resetting quickly each scene change and in particular the well-placed calendar so we knew the time period.

The costumes by **Susan Bell and cast** were appropriate for the characters with rapid bump development for Hannah and a green nurse's uniform that captured the awkwardness of the implied suggestion. The older sister's costumes suggested a power dresser with money.

The Programme by **Vicki Arnold** was simple and basic using just the script descriptions to describe the characters and listing the production team. The type face and imagery suggested an Eighties setting to me although with mobile phones in use it was a 21st Century period.

This is a script that promised more than it did delivered but Riverside Players got the most they could from it with good performances, clear voices and some good physical business. The result was amusing but not hilarious and a pleasant entertainment with a gentle positive underlying message as an alternative to the EURO 2024 on TV.

Thank you

Nick

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