

# **NORTH ESSEX THEATRE GUILD**

## **FULL LENGTH FESTIVAL 2011 – 12**

### **ADJUDICATION**

<b>Group</b>	<i>Writtle Cards</i>
<b>Venue</b>	<i>Writtle Village Hall</i>
<b>Date of Adj.</b>	<i>17<sup>th</sup> November 2011</i>
<b>Production</b>	<i>ABSURD PERSON SINGULAR</i> <i>by Alan Ayckbourn</i>
<b>Director</b>	<i>Michele Moody</i>
<b>Adjudicated by</b>	<i>Jenny Burke</i>
<b>Assisted by</b>	<i>Anne Sexton</i>

#### **Front of House / Publicity**

As usual at Writtle Cards there was a friendly welcome from the Front-of-house people. The hall had been decorated in a suitably festive manner (well done Clare Williams) which got one in the mood. As did the mulled wine and mince pies available as refreshment. The programme was nicely designed (again Clare) and included good information.

#### **Set Construction / Set Painting**

Ayckbourn sets a real challenge from the outset with this play: Its requirement for three kitchens to be represented. The Writtle Hall stage is not a large one and therefore things were inevitably tight. The designer had gone for a non-realistic simplicity – the same cupboards moved around. It did give the overall set a slightly bare feeling. The cupboards needed dressing with some contents. A touch more kitchen design realism might have been good. There was some good solidity to things like the doors. I particularly liked the bare bulbs in Act 2 – a nice touch.

#### **Props**

All the right props to enhance the action had been found – aprons, bowls, tea towels, etc. I was particularly impressed with the packet of 'VIM'. Well done.

#### **Lighting Design and Operation**

The lighting was quiet basic: An effective general cover with no shadows.

#### **Sound Design and Operation**

There was suitably jolly music to get us in the mood pre-curtain. Sound effects such as the rain and the dog barking (which can be a bit tricky on timing) were realistic.

#### **Costumes**

The play is set in the 1970s and collection of costumes were well-chosen to the era and to the characters wearing them. I really loved Marion's negligée in the final scene.

## **CAST**

### **SIDNEY (Neil Smith)**

What a perfect choice Neil was for the part of Sidney. His portrayal was suitably annoying and very anal with a really irritating edge to his voice. Neil created a character whose anxiety was almost palpable in the first scene, he then showed Sidney growing in confidence, until finally being in control. This progression of changes was well-defined and characterised by Neil.

### **JANE (Sharon Goodwin)**

Jane is an anxious, socially inadequate fusspot and Sharon gave us these traits well in a realistic portrayal. She also mapped the changes in confidence thoroughly and with Neil formed a good acting partnership.

### **RONALD (Daniel Curley)**

Ronald is a man driving his wife to drink with his total lack of anything interesting to say and his own self-absorption. Daniel began his Ronald in a rather jocular manner. It was a confident and assured characterisation, but for me he was perhaps a little too energetic, interested and worldly-wise and I could not entirely link this with Marion's behaviour. However, in the second act, when he was required to try to repair a broken light, and subsequently received an electric shock, his timing and delivery were brilliant and he created one of the comic highpoints of the evening.

### **MARION (Liz Curley)**

Marion is a snob: her dialogue is packed with condescension. Liz was very expressive and amusing, although perhaps not cruel enough in delivering this side of Marion. In Act 3 her morose, drunken Marion was a tour-de-force and a joy to watch. Liz captured a woman recognising her disillusion and how the years were passing her by. Through her convincing portrayal we were able to empathise with this woman completely. I was totally captivated with the performance by Liz throughout this section of the play. Well done.

### **GEOFFREY (Chris Ivermee)**

With his rather laid-back 'hippy' persona, Geoffrey is a difficult character to nail down. Chris made a good effort, but did not seem quite as assured as some of the others. However, he successfully portrayed the changing circumstances of his life and dynamics of his marriage.

### **EVA (Shelley Goodwin)**

Eva is another challenging role: The part of a suicidal, withdrawn, depressive is not easy. Shelly was perhaps a little too expressive when in this state. However her body language was good. She also made the change to the confident Eva quite marked.

## **Production**

This was a well cast production taken at quite a brisk pace. The cast created interesting characters and handled the comic elements well.

Movement was well handled. There were some extremely difficult scenes when all the actors were required on stage, negotiating their way round the furniture in a very confined space. The 'comings and goings' through various doors was very amusing and well timed by all. It was a pity that when Sidney became drenched in dirty water in Act 2 he remained at the back of the stage. This is a brilliantly written piece of comic theatre and was well performed here and it would have had more impact had the actor been placed at the front of the stage.

The white cupboards set a good tone for the first kitchen, but as virtually the same elements were used for the second act the change of venue was not sufficiently highlighted. I did wonder about the cooker. As this was really only essential in Act 2, it could have been hidden behind a false cupboard, to be revealed for the second kitchen. Although the set did not entirely reflect three kitchens in different homes, and the social status of each couple, I was aware of, and appreciated, the amount of work that had been given to ensure all the important elements of each kitchen were provided; cooker, washing machine, sink, etc. No mean task for any group.

## **Conclusion**

I congratulate this group on selecting what is undoubtedly one of Alan Ayckbourn's more challenging plays to stage. Brilliantly written, with delightfully crafted and comical characters. One of his most popular works, it is always well worth any group tackling.

The cast created clear and recognisable characters, with some extremely well crafted and timed performances; not only delivering the comedy, but also able to bring out the darker side of this author's work. Having been in and seen this play a number of times, I never tire of seeing it again.

Jenny Burke