

Absurd Person Singular, Writtle Cards
Performed Nov 19, 2011 at Writtle Village Hall

Director Michele Moody

Despite the early 1970s stereotypes of snobbish bank managers, liberal professionals and the aspirational lower middle classes there are still sufficient fundamental truths within the text of Ayckbourn's *Absurd Person Singular* to resonate today. Each of the three married relationships explored through the three acts were broken, or at least rather less than perfect and were sufficiently well characterized that the audience could probably sympathize with all of them. The extent of that sympathy no doubt depended on the degree of identification with one's own or a close friend's marital situation. Seen through the lens of a post-feminist age it is hard to see why Jane put up with Sydney or why Eva put up with Geoffrey. But then there must be plenty of Janes and Evas who do just that and find some justification for carrying on. The first Act clearly establishes the characters of hectoring husband Sidney and his eager to please wife Jane. Neil Smith is excellent as Sidney, barking orders to his wife as though thoroughly in command and yet panicking at the first sign of trouble (no tonic left!) in front of his social superiors. His transition through the play, as he prospers, is good while Sharon Goodwin, as Jane, is also convincing as she slots into the classic dutiful wife role, happier cleaning the oven than socializing with supposedly useful contacts. Daniel and Liz Curley convey the cynical older married couple, Ronald and Marion, beautifully. Ronald's vicarious enjoyment of Geoffrey's status as local Lothario betrays a deep-seated unhappiness with his own marriage. Sure enough we discover a broken relationship which Ronald stoically endures but from which Marion escapes into a bottle. These were very assured performances full of subtlety and nuance. Not subtle but certainly hilarious was Ronald's electrocution and subsequent nursing as he was wrapped in various items of underwear. Marion's descent into a drunken stupor was also well handled. Shelley Goodwin was an attractive Eva who milked the schadenfreude during the multiple suicide attempts in Act 2 and for whom I suppose we felt the most sympathy. However, being married to serial philanderer, Geoffrey, well played by Chris Ivermee, was clearly not an ideal basis for a happy marriage. That Geoffrey's own circumstances should change and that he should become emotionally dependent on Eva was a nice plot twist and Eva's emergence as nurse to Marion in Act 3 revealed yet another facet of her character. Perhaps what we conclude is that nothing is what it seems and that there is nowt so queer as folk. That was certainly the message from Sydney as he poured another drink, turned up the music and danced his cares away as the curtains closed.

This was an enjoyable return to Writtle Cards after a period of absence through date clashes and holidays. Congratulations to all involved. This was a great night out with a strong cast, good set and high production values.

Reviewer – Stewart Adkins
NODA East, District 8