

# COMIC POTENTIAL

Writtle Cards at the Village Hall

Review by Michael Gray

Well, I would never have guessed it was by Ayckbourn. Miles outside his comfort zone, it's a dark philosophical , romantic comedy which attracted some great reviews a decade ago in the West End and on Broadway.

We're asked to imagine a future when robots [aka actoids] churn out daytime soaps. An idealistic young writer [Ben Fraser], nephew of the studio's owner, is smitten by one such drone [Elaine Reynolds, consistently charming in a huge role], teaches her the double-take and the custard pie, and grooms her for stardom.

The whole thing needs a deal of style to overcome gaps in logic; the second act, despite the frequent scene changes, was more enjoyably farcical.

The most believable character here was the over-the-hill movie director, nicely played by Neil Smith. He was too young for the part, but his rambling reminiscence of his glory days was beautifully done. I liked the two “shrews” who seemed to be the only crew [Sharon Goodwin and Clare Williams], and there were accomplished cameos from Jean Speller as an older actoid and a trollope, and from the talented, always watchable Daniel Curley as waiter, desk clerk and the mute Uncle, with an elegant Michele Moody as his mouthpiece. Andy Millward was an amusing faulty actoid, Shelley Goodwin did what she could with an injured actoid and the boutique assistant, and Liz Curley got the custard pie as man-hungry executive Carla Pepperbloom.

More care could have been taken with the music and the programme, but I liked the pin-ups around the auditorium: Buster Keaton, C3PO, Wall-E ...

Overlong, not as confident or snappy as it needed to be, but still an interesting revival of a rare Ayckbourn. It was directed by Sarah Wilson, and produced by Nick Caton.