

**Writtle Cards – Two One Act Plays**  
**Performed in Writtle Village Hall, May 21, 2010.**  
**Directors – Laura Bennett and Hazel Reilly**

For their May production Writtle Cards presented two of Noel Coward's one act plays Still Life and Fumed Oak, each written as one of ten plays that make up 'Tonight at 8.30', a cycle to be performed across three evenings. Still Life was later transformed into the wonderful film Brief Encounter, voted the most romantic of all time.

The stage for Still Life, portrayed a refreshment room at Milford Station, good detail with Nestle posters on walls, open fires and check table cloths, gave this an air of times gone by. Being such a small stage it was sometimes difficult for the cast to enter through the door if other actors were nearby. This could have been avoided by angling the buffet table. Consideration should have been given to let the lighting help suggest the month or time of day, as it always seemed to be black outside.

Michele Moody and Nick Caton were in the main roles as Alec & Laura. Their costumes was good and Michele really got to grips with the sad role of middle class Laura but I never felt that Nick was entirely comfortable with the role of the Doctor and I didn't really believe that he was really in love with her.

The comic roles of Myrtle and Albert (Sharon Goodwin and Boot Banes) worked well, as did the marvellous cameo by Daniel Curley as Stanley who shone on stage as the cheeky chappy, with an eye for young waitress Beryl (Michele Ashby). Hilary Jones, who came on at the end as Laura's neighbour Dolly, was excellent and used her 'refined voice' to perfection. What a shame the lights went off before they exited for their train, it made the ending awkward rather than terribly sad. Vocal projection was sometimes lost when actors spoke 'upstage'

Fumed Oak is a short, two scene play and concerns a middle-aged browbeaten husband living with his family and the mother in law from hell which was excellently portrayed by the talented Jean Speller. Her facial expressions were a treat to behold. I did feel sorry for her though having to wear that awful wig!! The set was again good portraying the modest home of the Gow family although again the window outside showed no sign whether it was night or day. .

Boot Banes returned to the stage again to become Henry Gow who can only take so much and finally after a few drinks has the courage to leave them to their arguments and petty squabbling; and to start a new life elsewhere. Boots has a wonderful 'presence' on stage and I enjoyed his retribution speech at the end. His screeching wife Doris (Elaine Reynolds) and Elsie his spoilt daughter (Clare Williams) made you realise just why he was leaving. A good play to end the evening.

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Reviewer – Christine Davidson