

THE ODD COUPLE
(FEMALE VERSION)
BY NEIL SIMON
I.E.S

INTRODUCTORY NOTES

I had never heard of the female version of The Odd Couple so it was interesting to go through the text and discover the various characters. I will make no further reference to the male version as I feel these plays stand alone and I found the female version much funnier (possibly biased here). As soon as I saw the cast list I knew it was going to be well performed and settled back for a good evening. Thank you, Lyn, for changing our seats so that I could see the entire set as we had an excellent view of all the set and the comings and goings which did cover all of the acting area.

PRESENTATION

The set was great and I could really believe that Olive would chose this kind of very stylish apartment but would be very casual about looking after it. As always at I.E.S. I have to admire the construction of such a splendid set with all the doorways and exits and the back wall adding another dimension. It was very well designed and solid as a rock. As Dave Goodall was in charge this was to be expected and I have several times commended Dave and his team for their sets. It was also well dressed to make it a believable 'pad' for Olive and so well done to Ann and her team as you must have had to do a lot of sourcing for such a busy set. Costumes were also effective giving an immediate insight to the characters and the entry of Florence being so primly and properly dressed immediately established the character that Olive had been building in her anxiety about Florence. Mickey's police uniform with its accessories was excellent and I really liked the glitzy top adding a sparkle to the group, and so well done Nicola and Kate. The props had clearly been well considered and sourced by Ann, Lyn and the cast. The sound levels were very good and there was no issue about losing a good line with the mikes. The lighting was simple but effective and in Act Two seemed a little brighter as if to give a cleaner feel now that Florence was in charge, All in all I thought this show had been a real team effort and I got the sense of rehearsals that had been much enjoyed by all the cast and crew. The change in the set between Acts One and Two really showed the 'Florence effect'. Well done team. I saw no mention of make-up so I assume the cast did their own, and they all looked good in their roles.

ACTING

OLIVE - PAULA DENNING

Paula gave a smashing performance of the successful 'media mogul' who lived in relative squalor and a supported a feckless but demanding partner. It was clear that Olive relied on her 'Trivial Pursuit' evenings with the girls and is totally uninterested in domesticity. She is concerned about Florence but used to her behaviours and shrugs off remarks relating to Florence's possible suicide attempts, knowing it is all for attention. Paula gave a good rendition of this character and I would have given good money to be in that bathroom when Florence bit her and she punched her out. Olive is very fond of Florence

but knows exactly what a drama queen she is. The other girls want to support Olive during this ordeal and leave unwillingly while Olive carries on attending to Florence, and the tete-a-tete at the end of Act One was a great piece of almost role reversal as Olive confesses that her brash exterior hides a fear of loneliness. A good role and Paula did it justice throughout - the scenes with Jesus and Manolo were very good.

FLORENCE - KAYLEIGH PARTT

Kayleigh played the obsessive neurotic Florence all too well. Everyone knows someone like her, always doing the right thing, always perfectly turned out and always playing the martyr. However the transition into powerful home organiser in Act 2 was very well done, highlighted by the food changing from the mouldy sarnies and ageing crisps of Act 1 to cordon bleu nibbles for the girls. It is clear that already Olive is losing the plot with her. Kayleigh showed Florence to be one of those people who only hear what they themselves are saying. She is quite pleased when the girls pack their game in early and Olive is down as she thinks her friends are deserting her because they can't take Florence's behaviours. The cup throwing scene was funny but with an underlying tension and it culminates in Olive feeling trapped in her own flat. The introduction of the Spanish men who Olive would like to mix with scares Florence as she wants to be in control - the idea that her mother -in-law would fly in from Florida and catch her with two men was very real to Florence and very funny to the audience. This scene is important as it makes us feel sorry for Olive and indeed Stanley. A nice performance as the manipulating 'poor me' and I particularly liked Kayleigh in the first scene with Manolo and Jesus where she really does not like the foreigners. Well done.

THE GIRLS

Mickey - Vicky Hobbs, Vera - Maggie Goodall,
Renee - Yvonne McGuinness, Sylvie - Jacqueline Wanstall.

Compared to Olive and Florence these parts are quite small but they are all very important and the characters must be right. I must say you all looked as if you were having a great time but the serious ideas came across very poignantly.

Vicky gave a very tight performance as the policeman taking command as soon as she heard that Florence was missing. Mickey had hard one liners and could have come across as unsympathetic but Vicky in a nicely balanced way managed to be organized, supportive, sympathetic and in control and her joy in the announcement of the pregnancy was well done. Thank you.

Vera was the most grounded of all the women, probably because she is the one in the most normal relationship. She finds some of the other women's little obsessions rather irritating and Maggie had some wonderful facial expressions conveying irritation with affectionate balance. She is practical and forthright and it was made obvious that much as she loves her family the games and the evenings with the girls mattered a lot to her. Very well done.

Renee as matriarch of the group was nicely done by Yvonne. She hates the rubbish food but her commitment to the gag was most endearing. One of her lines about food and men was delivered to perfection (sorry, that sounded as if you only had one good line - you had loads but that line was a corker). Yvonne showed tolerance and had a been-there

done-that attitude which grounded the group - Renee is to be my inspiration for getting older.

Sylvie comes across as the most normal of the group - she is pregnant and she is very concerned about Florence and is the one who wants to take some action but she can't think what, having never been in such a situation. Her relationship with Vera seemed as if she was slightly intimidated by her but Sylvie is the one who calls Olive as she goes on about the arrangement of Florence's bowl of nuts. Thank you for a nicely played role.

MANOLO - ROBERT GRAYDON, JESUS - GEORGE MONTAGUE

What a pair you two made! Why don't you give up the day job and go into stand-up? You were both hysterically funny and your accents were something else. I really admired how well you kept your faces straight when the audience were howling. You put across really well your - 'we are nice Spanish men with important values and we are generous hearted!' but it was also evident that you wanted a woman around to skivvy, and fortunately control-freak Florence signed up! Who knows how that would turn out - I would love to see Neil Simon write the script.

Thank you both for lovely performances and great comic timing.

CONCLUSION

All in all I really enjoyed this play and was glad to have been able to read it first. The audience had a great evening and it looked like you were all enjoying yourselves too. Thank you Lyn for a very good time.