

Iminster Entertainments Society

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HARVEY

by Mary Chase

INTRODUCTION

I had not seen this play (of course I have seen the film which is considered a classic) and when I read it I did not think much of it. I found it very dated and lacking in pace. I knew that there had been a revival this year of Harvey with Maureen Lipman and James Dreyfus and so I googled this after the show– the best critique that the production received was that while the audience laughed a lot it was never as funny as one hoped it would be and that more or less summed up my feelings. Having said that reaction to any performance is personal and there was a great deal to praise and enjoy.

PRESENTATION

Generally the presentation was good. The scene was set in a well- off home with a good choice of furnishings thank you Chris – for the period it was a little bare but this was clearly to facilitate the set changes as too much clutter would have slowed them up considerably and so this was a good call by Chris to minimize the difficulty for the stage crew. The props were all appropriate but I did not really like the Harvey/Elwood painting – Elwood looked like a man but Harvey looked like a comedy bunny not a real rabbit but this was personal as my companion thought it was the right sort of rabbit. The costumes were generally very impressive, well done to Kate and I really liked the effort that had been made to match Myrtle Mae's first costume to the description given by Veta over the phone – a nice detail and I also thought the shabby cabby outfit was very convincing and it was a nice touch to have the judge in his golf outfit. There was no mention of hair or make-up in the programme so I assume the cast took care of themselves and I thought everyone looked right for their role so thank you all. In terms of set design and build I thought it was a triumph and was stunned to check the programme and see that Dave Goodall was heading these as well as taking the lead. The stage crew were clearly well trained by Paul and the spontaneous applause for the guys who moved the set round was a real compliment to the design and simplicity of construction and Dave, Brian and Peter are to be congratulated on the result, very impressive. Lighting and sound were good and I was particularly impressed with the lighting of the two consulting rooms at the back of

the clinic as many lighting guys would not have bothered as no action actually took place in that light so well done Brian. All in all presentation was very good and although there were a couple of first night hiccups – the door jammed a bit and there was a miss on the phone - they did nothing to slow up the show in any way. Thank you all.

PRODUCTION

I have already said that I was not impressed with the dated script and found it lacked pace but this was in the writing rather than in the direction. David had obviously thought hard about grouping and stage movement and there was very little masking and very good grouping. The major movements of all the actors had been well thought out and were mainly natural. The energy of the play was a bit lacking at times and of course Elwood has to be laid back but Veta and Wilson injected a lot of power in the scenes they were in and it was noticeable. I think that the director had the actors point every laugh line for the audience and, although it was a small first night audience, they responded joyfully and with real enjoyment. The appalling attitude of the American middle classes of the time to alcoholism and treatment of mental illness was also well defined and portrayed and that showed sensitive appreciation of the issues so very well done to David for keeping all the humour but giving the situation an edge. However I think what impressed me most was the bond he had created among the cast – they all worked well together and there was a coherence in the relationships throughout the play - good leadership, congratulations.

ACTING

MYRTLE MAY SIMMONS - REBECCA MAULL

I remember seeing Rebecca in the recruiting officer and it is good to see her back. She is a very good performer and had a difficult role to play in this show as Myrtle Mae is an unlikeable character who just wants to get rid of Uncle Elwood to smooth her path to social advancement. Rebecca did put across the selfishness of Myrtle and was very good in the 'flirty' scenes with Wilson. Her relationship with Veta was good although occasionally her manipulative attitude was overdone for what is basically an ingénue role but then I quite liked the spoilt brat performance. A strong contribution to the overall essence of the play, thank you Rebecca.

VETA LOUISE SIMMONS – MAGGY GOODALL

A very strong role and really well played. The social climbing mother in the first part of the play contrasted well with the 'abused' desperate patient and her attitude towards putting Elwood through what she had suffered led to a feeling of antipathy in the audience while they still

appreciated the comedy – a difficult coup to pull off so well done Maggy. This made her return to the affectionate sister of her youth at the point where she realised that a nice Elwood with Harvey was better than a horrid one without believable and attractive to the audience. Her relationship with Myrtle and the oiliness towards Mrs Chauvenet were convincing and the scenes with Veta and Elwood were really well done – a good pairing and convincing relationship. Well done

ELWOOD P DOWD – DAVE GOODALL

A very difficult role to take on as James Stewart's performance is over the sense of going along with everyone and everything while doing exactly as you wished was so convincing and so was your interaction with Harvey. You looked up towards him at the same angle throughout so we all knew exactly how high he was and this got funnier every time and the gentle criticism of the folk that got in Harvey's way was entertaining. Your relationships throughout were convincing– I have already mentioned Veta – and I especially enjoyed the quick rapport with the taxi-driver and the scene with Chumley about Acron – very nicely done indeed. You have a good sense of irony and this came across very clearly in your final speech. Thank you for such an enjoyable characterisation.

MISS JOHNSON – MADDIE LOWE

A thankless walk on part with really nothing for Maddie to do and no role in the plot – it must only be in the script to establish the status of the Simmons ladies. Thank you for doing it with grace.

MRS ETHEL CHAUVENET – URSULA MCKINLEY

The socially important Mrs Chauvenet is also in the play to reinforce the status of the social –climbing Simmons and to show the audience of the effect that Elwood and 'Harvey' have on Veta's aspirations for her daughter. This cameo was very nicely played by Ursula and her desperate exit reinforces to the audience the awful situation Veta and Myrtle are in which may seem a bit silly to a 21st century audience but her reaction was a very real social attitude at the time the play was written. Very good accent and delivery and the increasing panic was well portrayed. Thank you.

RUTH KELLY RD – KAYLEIGH PARTT

In many ways this is a bit of a thankless part in that it really does not give scope for much characterisation and I think Kayleigh did well to give us a convincing person from the script. Her relationship with Chris was believable and they performed well together. Kayleigh's starry eyed approach to Dr Sanderson in her first scene had a touch of the 'Dr Kildares' about it and her sympathetic approach to Veta was also endearing but I really enjoyed her feistiness later on in the play and she

and Elwood built a nice rapport. The scene where she was annoyed with Lyman over the drinks with Elwood was good and their later reconciliation was also convincing. A nice performance.

DUANE WILSON – MARCK PEARLSTONE

This was a nice part and Marck made the most of it. He looked the part of the 'heavy' and his bullish approach as a man who enjoyed his job and felt he was protecting society reinforced the characterisation. I really liked his relationship with Myrtle Mae and, while this is an odd compliment, Marck played the 'letch' well. His protective approach to Dr Chumley was also convincing and he gave the impression of appreciating the employer who facilitated his opportunities for sadistic treatment of the unfortunate patients. The audience clearly enjoyed his performance and somehow it gave the character an 'endearing side' in spite of his obvious pleasure in tormenting these poor souls with strait jackets and water treatments. His later relationship with Elwood was also convincing in spite of the script and Marck turned in a good performance all round, well done.

LYMAN SANDERSON MD – CHRIS WILLIAMSON

This was another difficult role of the acolyte to Chumley desperate to use the great man to get on. Chris gave a solid performance as the aspiring young psychologist and as I have already said his tentative should we/shouldn't we relationship with Ruth was believable. He was suitably unctuous to Chumley and showed great self interest in his attitudes to the family of Elwood. However his best scene was the row with Ruth which led on to other things!

A nice characterisation – thank you.

WILLIAM R CHUMLEY MD – HENRY WILSON

I think the damning attitude of the times towards mental illness/alcoholism (even nowadays sometimes confused) was very well put across by Henry. His obvious contempt for human frailty and his irritation with 'lesser mortals' came across well. His position in society made him feel almost godlike in that he could more or less do as he wanted and Henry delivered this characteristic well. The end of Act I where he realises that Sanderson has let the real patient leave following the treatment of Veta and he starts to panic was really well done but the highlight for me was when he was talking about Acron – it was beautifully done and the change from the harsh doctor to the dreamer was so very believable - thank you for a really moving episode.

BETTY CHUMLEY - JO NEAGLE

Betty is a real stereotype of a woman who knows her position in society is dictated by her husband's success – she enjoys her social life and

while bustling and busy is a kindly soul. Jo played this part well and the scene where she meets Elwood and they have the conversation about the pooka was very entertaining and the relaying of this to Chumley with the realisation that comes that he has let the real patient go was a good piece of performance.

JUDGE OMAR GAFFNEY – MICHAEL LEACH

Judge Gaffney is a nice decent man who wants the best for the community and tries hard to help Veta as a family friend and to do what he thinks is best for Elwood. He is not the sharpest knife in the drawer and it took a while for him to get the story straight but his grumpiness hides a heart of gold and in the end he comes down on the right side. Michael performed his character well and was a good support player. Thank you.

EJ LOFGREN – NEIL LANE

This was a lovely scene and must have been a joy to perform even if you had to wait for hours and then be on stage for such a short time. I love deus ex machine (that should end in an a but my computer won't allow it, sorry) characters who suddenly put everything into perspective and you did it so well and the scene with Elwood was great. A lovely cameo thank you so much Neil.

Conclusion

All in all the purpose of a play is to give pleasure to the participants and to the audience and while I think the plot does not stand the test of time there can be no doubt that on the first night the small audience had a great time and the cast and crew worked their socks off. Thank you all.

Polly English.