

WHARFEDALE FESTIVAL OF THEATRE 2007-2008:
WRITTEN ASSESSMENT

Play: "Children's Day"

Entrant: Weeton & Huby Players

Performance seen: 24.11.07 **Venue:** Almscliffe Hall, Huby

1. Stage Presentation

This heading includes stage setting, props, lighting, sound, costumes and make-up.

There was everything in this set that should be there and it looked like the basement kitchen in a London town house. The view from the French window was good but you must be careful that people moving around backstage don't knock up against the scenery: the tree rocked on occasions when people backstage brushed against it.

The set was well dressed with children's paintings on the wall (I liked the painting of the potato/robin that is called for in the script). There was a gollywog on a notice-board alongside various bits of paper, a teddy in a corner, and other general clutter of everyday family living in a house with small children. The props directly associated with the children's party were excellent and I particularly liked the way the set was dressed for Act Two Scene Two after the children had been down to the kitchen to eat: it looked as though a tornado had hit it and you accomplished this re-dressing of the set very quickly. The pedal car was good. It would be too much to ask to have the sawn-off part of a pedal car exactly matching the original but you made a reasonable attempt to make it look authentic. The rabbit was good but Mavis made more effective use of it by contriving to make its ears move, which Tom did not do.

You made a good effort at timing the party sounds every time the door opened and shut but on occasions it was slightly out, starting or stopping either too early or too late, and when it was out it did of course spoil the illusion. The sound was also supposed to be slightly different at times - for example, when Polly hears Matthew's voice and rushes upstairs to see what he is complaining about - but the sound from upstairs did not ever seem to be any different. Just a quick yell over the top of the general hubbub would have been enough. Possibly Sophie could have done this from backstage. It would have helped the illusion that there were real children up there who were not always in the same place doing and saying the same things.

The lighting did not have to change during the play and the set was well lit throughout.

The costumes were fine and in period but dressing Sophie as a hippie did not fit with the script. Tom says of her that she is "*showing all she's got*", which

in that outfit Sophie certainly did not do. If you wanted to costume her that way, you should have changed the script. I particularly liked Peter's shirt and medallion: it fitted his character well.

On the whole the make-up was good but Peter had not blended his make-up into his hairline. There was a very noticeable area on his right temple where the line of the make-up finished and ordinary skin began. Sophie's hippie face-makeup was a clever touch.

2. Production

This heading includes interpretation of the spirit and meaning of the play, teamwork, general pace and variation in tempo, grouping and movement, making of points, and sense of climax. It is also under this heading that an assessor takes account of the greater difficulty involved in tackling a production with a large cast.

The teamwork throughout was pretty good and you have obviously worked hard but this is a seventies farce which has dated. In twenty years' time it will be a period piece and easier to sell to an audience but right now it is not an easy play to sell. Even though it was written by two Leeds-born playwrights, it was written primarily to amuse a Home Counties audience. Its jibes about northerners are not the sort of thing that is going to endear it to people in Yorkshire, who are only too aware that for some people civilisation ends at Watford Gap, and I was pleased to see that you substituted your own ending for the one written in the script where there is general jubilation in Hampstead at northerner Mavis finally having a bath.

This is a play that needs plenty of pace and on the whole you achieved this but the pace did drop on a number of occasions. You had a lot of entrances and exits to manage and at times you were so focussed on managing those that you allowed the overall impetus to be lost.

On the whole, grouping and movement were well thought out but there was one really bad episode of masking where Emma was on the landing and Tom, Polly and Peter were in a completely straight line below her downstage right. They stayed in this position for some time and I would have expected the more experienced actors involved to realise the problem and move to break up that line. Just one pace forward, for example by Tom, would have done it.

3. Acting

This heading includes characterisation, audibility of speech, variation in tone, appropriateness of emphasis, gesture and movement.

Emma: The star of the show - an excellent performance and totally believable. Good comedy timing and excellent changes of tempo between gaiety and pathos. Your relationship with Robin was totally believable, too. Very, very well done.

- Polly:** Really looked the part but you tended to underplay your role too much and you need to learn to project your voice more. At times the audience had to strain to hear you. This will come with more acting experience and greater confidence. Your relationship with Peter was believable, as was your friendship and affection towards Emma. You have talent and this was a good performance from a newcomer.
- Peter:** A very confident, relaxed performance from someone who is used to the stage. Just be careful with your make-up. Your comedy timing is very good and I particularly liked your reading of the children's book and the chortles that went with it, and your "Simon Says" was delightful.
- Mavis:** A very confident performance from a newcomer to the adult amateur stage. You have good presence, excellent timing, and you managed most of your multitude of entrances and exits very well. You did make a mistake with the butter, though - you should have had a plate or similar on which to scrape off the butter when you were "upstairs" but instead you came back down with it still on the knife. Audiences notice these things!
- Tom:** As usual with you, this was an excellent, confident, powerful and very poised performance. No difficulty whatsoever in hearing you in the back row!
- Robin:** You seemed very tense which tended to inhibit you from projecting your personality in this role but apart from this you did a very good job. You certainly do have acting talent and when you get more confidence this talent will blossom. Just try to remember the audience is never out to get you: they're on your side and willing you to do well.
- Sophie:** A nice little cameo from a very talented young actress. Despite being new to the adult amateur stage you seemed very relaxed and in control. Well done.

4. Theatrical Attainment

This heading covers the general impression made by the performance as a whole, the type of play chosen, its dramatic merit, the suitability of the cast, the originality and effort shown in the performance and the standard achieved.

As at present you only do one play a year, your choice of play is absolutely crucial. I think in all honesty that you could have chosen a better play than this one as a vehicle for the members of your company because, in order to develop your actors both as a group and as individuals, they needed something more substantial than this play to get their teeth into. However, having said this, you made a good attempt at putting this play across and it was cleverly directed.

Thank you for an enjoyable evening.



(Bernard Riley)

27.11.2007