



Be inspired by amateur theatre

Mr A's Amazing Maze Plays
Bampton Players
By Alan Ayckbourn
Directed by Avril Saxby
Musical Director: Hugh Saxby
Bampton Riverside Hall
Tuesday 10th October 2019

'Tricia Barclay

NODA SW Representative District 6

The road to Bampton is always travelled with eager anticipation, and again on this occasion the Players didn't disappoint, although there were a few bemused faces at first in the audience on opening night! This was not the usual Ayckbourn that perhaps they were expecting, but they were soon swept along with the fun! Written for youngsters, but played by adults, this was a tale of mystery and imagination, relying heavily on audience participation in the second half, and ingeniously constructed with traces of the author's talent for pungent humour! Suzy's father took flight literally one day in a hot-air balloon, and has not come down since. Her mother is busy working hard to make ends meet and gives Suzy a puppy as a companion. Suzy and Neville, the "pedigree" Old English Wolf Boxer, use the garden of the empty mansion opposite as their playground, until one day Mr Accousticus takes up residence and strange things start to happen! When Mr Passerby, a once famous opera singer, suddenly loses his voice, and Neville loses his bark, the two friends are suspicious of their new neighbour and decide to get into the mansion and search for themselves. The adventure really begins as they explore the house, turning this way and that, according to instructions shouted from the audience, making for a potential different scenario at each performance! Playing on the long side of the hall, staging was kept to a simple rostrum area US, and the floor in front for the outside spaces and the interior of the house, with gates, doors and other obstacles introduced by the stage crew as required. The character of Suzy, lonely but caring and brave, was well established from the start, and the energy required for the role maintained throughout. Her loyal companion Neville was adorable, with some typical "canine" mannerisms and actions hilariously recreated. Mother showed a well-intentioned naivety, and succumbed surprisingly quickly to the somewhat suspect charms of her new neighbour, much to the dismay of Suzy and Neville who didn't trust him one bit! Mr Accousticus immediately made his presence felt as he perused his surroundings with an avaricious eye – it was so tempting to boo and hiss! Mr Passerby sang with enthusiasm, until he lost his voice, and did exactly as his

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name described, mostly heading for and meandering back from the local hostelry, which he performed with great conviction.

Holding all this together were the two Narrators, dressed alike in white dungarees, with the occasional wry smile and exchange of looks they certainly added to the enjoyment of the proceedings. Of course all ended happily ever after as Father floated back to earth in his hot air balloon, complete with flying jacket, helmet, goggles and scarf, in perfect Biggles formation! The stage crew were certainly an intrinsic part of this production, rushing on with gates and doors, and creating lifts, trap doors, balconies and wine cellars! All the props had been thoughtfully constructed, from the large Balloon Basket to the smaller one which created a perfect shadow on the back wall as it flew away into the sky for the Great International Balloon Race. The “deconstructed” Rubik’s Cube like contraption holding all the stolen voices, with individually painted little cupboards and opening doors, was amazing. Yes an alternative production, but cleverly choreographed with some deft touches and great fun! Woof woof!

Any observation made by the reviewer can only be based on what they see at the performance in question. The reviewer may have received information in advance of the performance and it is inevitable that their assessment will be affected by that knowledge.

The N.O.D.A. Representative’s intention is to give an objective critique of the overall production and in particular the performance viewed. It should be remembered that any review of this nature can only be objective as far as the techniques used during the performance observed. Any criticisms expressed may not have been valid at other performances, and are only made to encourage higher standards in Amateur Theatre.

It is hoped that the audience’s appreciation of your efforts will have given everyone a lift and encouraged you to greater achievements in the future and that the observations made by the reviewer will prove helpful in improving future productions.

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