

"ABIGAIL'S PARTY"

Abigail's Party is one of those iconic plays that certainly takes on a life of its own, depending on the cast.

This production, nicely directed by Joe Butcher, brought us the humour and rancour of the situations the players found themselves in – and their separate reactions.

The set, designed by Alan Goss, was a typical lounge of the era – very well-conceived, and it gave the cast different areas to move to when not sitting on the leather sofa or chairs – I thought it worked really well.

We had Mandy Vazquez as Beverley – the patronising and condescending wife of estate agent Lawrence, who is running himself ragged trying to please everyone – but certainly not pleasing his wife by his absences, and the fact he does more for his clients than he does for her. This was very evident, although I was a little concerned that Lawrence, played by Adam Croft became a little too shrill and frantic, without any real reason – a gradual build-up would perhaps have been more telling. That said, Adam got the condescension of the middle class estate agent, looking down a little on his slightly lower class neighbours.

I thought Mandy handled the part very well, but could have been a little more up front with her characterisation in some places – for example, her flirting with Tony was a little bit too overt, you could have missed it if you'd blinked in the wrong place, but the moment when they danced together, with hands straying all over the place was very good, and I am sure there was something between Lawrence and Susan? - they were so awkward with each other, which manifested itself in the strange dance they had, keeping as far apart as they could!

Overall I loved the way Beverley patronised Angela and Susan such a lovely tone of voice and look.

I thought Mandy's dress and hair really suited the part.

The fact that Beverley considered herself a cut above her new neighbours, and had obviously invited them round to show off her house and possessions was very cleverly achieved.

Christine Hobart created a very believable Angela – not out of the top drawer, always quick to put her rather surly husband down and revelling in discovering all the lovely things she thinks she ought to have to rival Beverley's home. The only thing that didn't ring entirely true was Christine's hair – that era she would have had a more structured hairdo!

Anthony Bird created the wonderfully surly Tony – who showed good reaction to Beverley and Susan, whilst being very off-putting with Angela - I loved the way his foot was going up and down all the time he was sat down – signalling his frustration and impatience with not wanting to be there.

Jenna Ryder-Oliver as poor Susan whose daughter, the Abigail of the title, was having a party, really got the character of the unconfident divorcee, very different for Jenna, as she usually plays the more forceful ladies, so to be able to pull back that much was

excellent – and she gave us some lovely facial expressions, for example over the cushion, and the refilling of her glass.

The fact that Beverley and Laurence seemed to think that they were being super party hosts by continually filling their guests glasses was amusing, as was the fact their guests were urged to smoke even though they didn't really want to – all encompassed in a facet of Beverley's nature that told her she was always right.

Beverley's enjoyment of Demis Roussos was meant to show her tasteless side I feel, and this was certainly accomplished!

I thought the end of the play all got a little hectic – but absolutely loved the CPR scene with Angela and Tony – very well done and extremely funny, and the fact that Susan suddenly found her voice was good.

It is strange how the two very different marriages seem to start unravelling before our eyes – and the tactless references to various things that had happened obviously belittling of their so-called friends.

I loved small things like the reference to the yellow Escort by Laurence, they were little throwaways that gave an indication of the character traits of each person.

All in all, a very good version of the play with humour and some pathos to the fore. A fine start to the Rep's 2015 season.

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