

“AND THEN THERE WERE NONE” – Dunstable Rep

The first play of the new season for the Rep was an intriguing and enjoyable one. We first saw the set in its infancy at the season launch evening, and the actual finished set was excellent – designed by Alistair Brown, built and dressed by Alan Goss and his team. I loved the verse on the chimney breast, it was stunning, and the ten soldiers on the mantelpiece were good, I think the numbers didn't go down quite as quickly as the dead – but no matter!

The beautiful Art Deco doors and the gold statuette just helped to create such a wonderful impression of the times. Richard Foster gave us an evocative and interesting lighting design, which all helped towards the Art Deco feel of the play. The storm sequence was particularly good.

The sound effects were excellent – you were aware of them, but not to the detriment of the action, and music well-chosen (mainly Shostakovich if I'm not mistaken) – which all created a slightly eerie and at times menacing ambience, which the actors were able to use to their advantage.

As always with the Rep, there was precious little to criticise – and distinctly more to praise. My criticisms would be what could be construed as nit-picking, but it is sometimes small things that mar an otherwise good production. Things like too long sleeves (Dave Corbett), very obvious hems on trousers (Chris Young), that sort of thing, which detracts from the action! – and just takes away slightly from the near-perfection of the piece.

I thought the play was well-cast, mixing experienced actors with those slightly newer to the Rep, which gave a good balance. Liz Blower created a strong character as Vera Claythorne, gradually becoming more confused and frightened over the course of the play. A secretary by profession, and therefore someone who engaged the scorn of the well-bred lady Emily Brent, played by Angela Goss. You could feel the disdain emanating from Miss Brent! Beautifully acted by both ladies. I loved the incident with the chair, when Miss Claythorne sat in what Miss Brent considered to be her seat, and the lovely line from Miss Brent about the unsuitability of Miss Claythorne's dress, thus building up the animosity between the ladies.

These two ladies were a good contrast to the other ladies of the cast – Jenny Monaghan as Narracot, a small but important role, and Julie Hanns as Mrs Rogers the housekeeper, who was the second victim. Again nicely played.

Phil Baker as Sir Lawrence Wargrave and Joe Butcher as William Blore, both gave impeccable performances (I would not expect less) – Joe as the ex-policeman engaged to keep an eye on things and Phil as the judge who eventually goes off the rails, and was not what I expected at all.

You can always rely on Phil and Joe to give depth to their characters, and they did not disappoint this time either. Luke Howard as Anthony Marston the first victim, created a very of-the-time character, devil-may-care type, who enjoyed speed and excitement – a good portrayal. Hopefully we will see more of him in the future.

Dave Corbett took on a different sort of character once again – he is hungry for diverse experience, and his Captain Lombard was nicely drawn. A contrast to the other male characters, adding dimension and interest. Dave got the rather throw-away attitude to human life well, whilst showing a slightly softer more caring side to Miss Claythorne

Chris Young was Dr Armstrong, a once eminent surgeon now beset with fears and indecisions, slightly confused at times – well studied and adding another dimension to the mix.

I thought Dave Billington created a very nice character as General Mackenzie, a much softer and withdrawn person than the other males – he was softly spoken, but every word was heard. A very different part for Dave, who usually plays more comedy parts, so good to see him gaining new experience.

Finally, Dave Hillman was Rogers the butler, who I felt could have shown a little more concern when his wife was killed, but otherwise created a believable character.

I thought the tableau at the end was a fitting curtain call – standard 'bows' would have been very out of place, Alistair certainly has his finger on the button and knows what works for a final effect.

I liked the fact that U.N. Owen was noted on the cast list, thus giving credence to the speculation that it was all his idea, that he was the murderer and that he would appear at some stage. It created uncertainty, so that the eventual ending was unexpected. So, another good play, especially well-presented with attention to detail in the set, costumes and effects – which enhanced the action. I really felt as if I was there, and the cast stepped up to the mark giving us a good evening's entertainment, with drama, intrigue, humour and surprise.

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