

“KEY FOR TWO” – Dunstable Rep

What a good start to 2013 – a very amusing production from the Rep, that really brightened a cold January evening. I must admit I was getting bored of the weather and TV, so was pleased to get out and see something that lightened my mood and engrossed me!

This was billed as a farce – but in reality was a comedy in Act 1 – that raised some good laughs, but really got going in Act 2, and the farcical element then had us in stitches. Anne Davis did a good job on direction, supported by a very workable set designed by Alan Goss – which allowed the cast to move round it easily and quickly. I thought the opening scene lacked a little in pace, but this picked up over the course of the play, with Act 2 being very fast-moving.

It was good to see Alan Goss back on stage in the part of Gordon, he created a strong character as the suave, sophisticated advertising executive, both pedantic and overtly sexy and a good foil to Clare Tozer-Roodt as Harriet his mistress. I thought they both started off rather tentatively, but they and their characters grew over the course of the production. Gordon was diarised as 'eggs' because he kept chickens who were obviously good layers, as he always brought a gift of eggs when he visited Harriet! I loved the scene where Gordon hurt his ankle – leading to all sorts of mayhem – and the breaking of a glass on the night I was there. This was dealt with swiftly and effectively by Harriet, who kept her lines going whilst picking up the bigger pieces then disappearing quickly off stage to find a dustpan and brush and clear up the rest of the glass, as Gordon was barefoot, and a later character had to crawl round on his hands and knees. So very well done Clare for presence of mind with dealing with and not being thrown by what could have been a potentially dangerous situation.

Clare also created a very believable character, as the mistress of two married men – Gordon and Alex, who saw her on different days of the week, and for the most part lived at home with their wives and families. Clare maintained the impression of a woman who needed the income from both men to keep her lifestyle and home in a manner to which she had become accustomed. Becoming defensive about her position when her friend accused her of being paid for her services! Harriet's mythical mother – who populated the days and times that served to keep the two men apart and who actually lived in Sidney – was an excellent mind picture – given that she appeared to be bordering on the alcoholic considering the amount of vodka she consumed, which both men were paying for.

Alec was played by Philip Davies, who gave us the complete opposite type to Gordon, in that he was an ebullient, bluff Northerner, whose diary entry was 'fish' – due to the fact he had trawlers and brought a gift of fish every time he visited. Julie Foster played Anna (Harriet's friend) who turned up out of the blue, and whilst adding to the confusion and turmoil, also became Harriet's unwitting assistant in keeping the two men apart, and then becoming thoroughly embroiled in the swiftly thought out plan of the house becoming a Nursing Home populated by the two men! Julie gave the character a coquettish side when dealing with the men, and a slightly waspish side with Harriet when discussing her situation – I thought she did very well, with a complex character.

When both men turned up together, and after various machinations by Harriet and her friend Anne to make sure neither knew the exact status of the other, Alex assisted Gordon to move to another room and in doing so strained his back – which was another fun moment, and led on to other problems for him when his wife turned up.

Both men's wives turned up during Act 2, creating even more mayhem. Gordon's wife Magda by tracing a phone number, and Alex's wife Mildred by reacting to a report from a private detective she had employed to find out what her husband was doing!! Magda was nicely played by who was a calm and slightly bewildered lady, who couldn't understand how her husband had hurt his ankle, and why he was in a nursing home. There was one place when Magda was shown into the waiting room (dining room) by Anna as the Nurse, when Magda got up from the chair and turned to her left, went all the way round behind the sofa and had to squeeze past Alex, who was getting a drink – the natural way to go would have been to turn to her right and walk out the door – there didn't seem to be a reason why, and it was probably the only movement in the whole piece that didn't seem natural.

Mildred, a very forceful Northern lady, was delightfully played by Penny Scales. We can always rely on her to bring a good strong character to the forefront, I really liked what she did with the part. The final member of a good cast was Barry Pain as Richard, Anna's vet husband who hankered after Harriet and again turned up out of the blue – drunk!! This added another element to the chaos. I particularly liked the scene where he was curled up in the armchair – and the way he moved round the chairs and the set.

The incidental music was jolly and I found myself swaying in my seat, which was good as it kept the interest there. Costumes were good, colourful for the ladies where needed, and more traditional for the men – they all looked smart and suitable for the characters. So, all in all a good evening's entertainment, that the audience really enjoyed, and which started the Rep's year off well.

Nova Horley