

"TABLE MANNERS"

'Table Manners' is a cleverly written play, with several twists and turns and some gentle, rather wry humour. There were a couple of laugh out loud moments, but on the whole it was an exposè of the lives led by three siblings and their spouses.

The set was suitable for the piece, well-lit, and gave the cast freedom of movement. I liked the fact that the cast cleared the table each time between scenes, with just a lowering of lights and not a blackout – John O'Leary in his first directorial role for the Rep, understood the need to keep an audience engaged throughout. I particularly liked his take on the bows – it created a final tableau where all the characters were still seeming to argue and pursue their own agendas – and made a change to the usual stiff bows that often follow a play. I enjoy it if director's try to be inventive even with the bows. It seemed to me that all the characters except Norman were selfish and egotistical, whereas Norman wanted everyone to feel loved and wanted, which was where all the problems stemmed from!

Jenny MacDonald played Sarah the very snobbish sister – who thought she was a cut above the rest of them, even though it seemed she, and her estate agent husband Reg, lived in a small house, which she desperately wanted to upgrade – her speech was very precise, as if Sarah really had to concentrate on the upper class accent – which came across well. Perhaps a little too slow and precise at times, but the feeling was there, along with lots of expression.

Reg was played to the hilt by Matt Flitton – a man who was mainly interested in himself and his stomach – so the fact that there wasn't much in the house to eat except salad didn't go down at all well – his facial expressions when Norman was talking at the breakfast table were excellent – and his laugh was super. A very good portrayal.

Annie the quiet retiring sister, trapped at home looking after mother – was played by Kate Johnson, in an unusual role for her – she had to be restrained, but show an occasional flash of passion, which I think Kate managed to achieve. She looked suitably dowdy, and downtrodden.

Anthony Bird gave us the rather hesitant character of Tom the vet – who had been a friend of Annie's for years, but doesn't seem to want or be capable of moving the relationship forward. I loved it when he was outraged because Norman wanted to take Annie away for a weekend – and hit him – so out of character, but believable. I also liked the final sentence he said about giving him first refusal if she sold the house – the typical male user who didn't want commitment! Nicely done.

The final sibling – Ruth, married to Norman, was played very nicely by Liz Harvey, a typical case of wondering how on earth the pair ever came together – she was very career-minded – and incredibly self-centred – a very telling portrayal.

Then we came to Norman, a lovely caring man in the midst of the dysfunctional family, who thought they were all better than him – although taking advantage of Annie on the living room rug and wanting to spend a weekend in East Grinstead with her, was perhaps not the best way to show that he cared, but he offered the same reassurance and support to Sarah – so it can't have been an entirely carnal thing –

and this part was played so well by Alex C Brewer, who has improved his performance skills so much by working with the Rep, I felt for him, and loved his monologue at the breakfast table.

I would say that this was a very good evening's entertainment – perhaps it didn't have the wow factor that some of the productions at the Rep have, but it was one which kept the audience engaged and interested, and they could genuinely say that they enjoyed the play and the performances.

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