

"THE FEMALE OF THE SPECIES" - Dunstable Rep

The Female of the Species is a very wordy play, that moved with fantastic pace from the cast- however, at times I would have liked a little slower pace so that I could evaluate all the information – as some of it was crucial to events that happened later in the play, and whilst my attention span is usually quite good, some of the words went so fast I found myself wandering! I must say that I found the play very amusing – but think it would have been more so if there had been some pauses from time to time for the information to sink in before moving to the next crisis.

The gun, when it made its appearance was not the cause of massive reaction, in fact it almost seemed to be an acceptable extension of Molly's arm, which I found rather unnerving. The men of the cast reacted more rigorously to it than the females! The set was very good – giving completely the right ambience for the play's setting, with good lighting and excellent sound effects – particularly the gun shots, which were startling but very realistic.

Angela Goss was the lynchpin that held the other cast members together – in the part of Margot Mason the author whose books were probably supposed to be a little tongue in cheek, but which some gullible members of the public took for gospel, causing all sorts of mayhem. Angela is so clever with roles like this – you could see the inconsistencies of the character, her gift for telling other females what to do – but her inability to admit to love or indeed other normal emotions. Angela plays these strong women well, whilst also showing the vulnerability of the role as well.

Christine Hobart played Margot's daughter Tess, a rather screwed-up individual, whose emotional growth had obviously been stunted by her mother's inability to love. She had eventually reached a point where she experienced a minor breakdown by walking out on her young children. I perhaps needed a little more angst from Christine at some points, but thought that overall the character was nicely drawn.

Ally Stafa was Molly, the rather strange student, who blamed Margot for all the problems in her life, because her mother died whilst holding a copy of one of Margot's books. A tenuous link, but one which the whole play hinged on. I felt that the character needed a little more depth, but I liked the fact that although she had a gun she didn't look comfortable with it, which would possibly be the case with someone who was acting on a whim.

I really liked Josh Thompson as Bryan, Tess's husband, who dashed to his mother-in-law's house when he found that Tess had walked out on their children. In his first decidedly grown up and more serious role I thought he was utterly believable, and got the character exactly right. Not too full on – but you could see he was attracted to Molly and all sorts of conclusions as to what would happen once the curtain fell, were encompassed within his portrayal.

Joe Butcher as Frank, the taxi driver who inadvertently becomes embroiled in the plot, created another dimension, as a rather rough taxi driver with a nice turn of phrase, which gave us a contrast to the rather refined and repressed ladies, and towards the end, obviously being a focus of Tess's wish for a new life, brought about by the frustrations stored up over the years of her marriage to the very staid and boring Bryan.

Roger Scales had a small but telling part as Margot's publisher, who it transpires was probably Tess's father, a point that had been ignored by Margot, and was certainly not known by Tess – thus creating a rather nice triangle, unwanted by Margot, but appreciated by Tess and Theo.

I can't say I liked the play as such – there were too many words, a lot of double entendres that needed a lot of attention to make the connection, but it did hold my attention, if only because if I'd relaxed I would have lost the plot!! But you don't have to like the vehicle to appreciate the people who brought it to life. It was a strange mix of comedy bordering at times on farce, satire and intrigue, none of which took the forefront.

Julie Foster directed it well, the movement round the set was good, and the moves were meaningful, and not just there for effect.

So I think my view would be – strong and diverse cast, not so sure about the play.

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