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Society : Belmont Theatre
Production : Separate Tables
Date : 25th October 2017
Venue : Pump House Theatre & Arts Centre
Report by : Gillianne Morris-Monk

Show Report

Thank you for inviting me to review your production and to Frankie, on behalf of **Estelle Dell** and the front of house team, for your hospitable welcome. It was lovely to see such a full house.

Terrence Rattigan always writes compelling narrative where there are hidden secrets to find out, about his characters. 'Separate Tables' does not disappoint. Director **Carole Baynes'** interpretation was spot on and she is certainly to be congratulated for her blocking of the characters' movements between and around the furniture, especially in the dining room where the efficiency of movement created the sense that there was more room than was actually possible on this small stage. Dialogue and action was kept moving along at a good pace to raptly hold the interest of the audience in what can sometimes be a rather long production – typical of Rattigan.

The set, designed by **Bill Rebello**, constructed by him, **Mark Dreelan & the Company**, and stage managed by **Graham Broderick**, was excellent. Both areas; dining room and hotel lounge were clearly defined. There was plenty of dressing in each area creating a feeling of natural rooms as opposed to a minimal stage set. My one small criticism is the dresser which was of a colour that would have made it from 1970's/1980's rather than 1954, but I am being very picky.

Mary Woolf and **Valerie Webb** are to be congratulated on their props. Much of the action centres around meal times in the dining room or coffee in the lounge so a lot of food and drink was required – you must have had a kitchen set up backstage!! Congratulations also to the two waitresses and Carole for their efficient prop changes with so many place settings and food involved.

Lighting/Sound – **Eddie Stephens** and **Helene Smith**

The seagull sounds prior to the opening music was a nice reminder that we are at a seaside hotel. All the scene changes and opening music was very appropriate. The rainstorm sound effect was nicely restrained so that we could still hear the dialogue and well controlled with the increase in volume when the French windows were open and a decrease as soon as they were closed. There was one small area DR which was slightly gloomy, otherwise the stage was very well lit with efficient fades in and out of scenes and between the two 'rooms'.

Wardrobe – **Anne Sutherland**

Most of the costumes were very authentic with a few modern outfits that fitted the 1950's bill admirably. The attention to detail with finishing touches enhanced the '50's feel, e.g. Miss Cooper always wearing a brooch, typical of this time. The wet mac when John Malcolm comes in from the rain was very good.

Very nice programme and poster design by **Mike and Maggie Morrow**.

'Separate Tables' relies on the characters being easily identified as well as, like jigsaw pieces, coming together to gradually unfold the narrative and reveal the secrets and shortcomings of each person. This cast did really well, capturing the foibles and nuances of each role whilst working well as a team. I was particularly impressed with the individual reactions to the Major when he comes into the dining room for lunch after being uncovered as a fraud.

Mrs Railton-Bell – Daniele Robson

A very strong performance portraying this dominating, upper class character. Clear, articulate dialogue with body language to match – when Mrs Railton-Bell entered the room we always knew she was in charge. Facial expression was particularly convincing, we always knew exactly what she thought of the other characters, and how superior she believed herself to be.

Lady Matheson – Estelle Dell

Estelle presented us with a gentle, upper class character, contrasting well with the dominating Mrs Railton-Bell, influenced by her but still letting us understand how she felt about the other characters and especially her concern for Sybil. It was a pity that on the Wednesday performance, moving right of John, in the lounge in Act I, that Estelle was forced to cross the 'room divide' lighting and be slightly out of the light. Hopefully the other cast members noticed this and left room from her on subsequent performances.

Miss Meacham – Lorna Alder

Nice characterisation as the slightly eccentric, elderly spinster with some interesting vagaries of expression.

Major Pollock – Mark Waghorn

Nice clear diction with good military bearing. A very proficient performance and characterisation. The change when found out to be a fake was masterfully handled.

Sybil Railton-Bell – Kim Wedler

Another superb character performance from this very accomplished performer. Lovely tone of voice and body language as the put-upon daughter at the beck and call of her forceful mother.

Doreen and Mabel – Dawn Harvey and Helen Sherwood

I really enjoyed the performance of the waitresses, adding nice comedy touches to the proceedings with lively dialogue and amusing asides as well as the deft handling of all the crockery, cutlery and food. Very nice duo. Well done ladies.

Mr Fowler – Bernard Vick

Very good characterisation as the garrulous, bumbling gentleman, with clear dialogue and a warm, gentle interaction with the other characters.

Anne Shankland – **Mary-Anne Anaradoh**

A polished performance with nice handling of the relationship with John. Elegantly presented as the mystery woman with very convincing emotions when we are able to see the turmoil behind the stylish, refined exterior.

John Malcolm – **Mike Bland**

This is a difficult role with different facets and complicated relationships with other characters. Mike produced a solid performance reacting well to the other characters, although I wasn't completely convinced about the relationship with Anne, I felt that more emotion towards the end of the play would not have been over the top for this character, although I can see why you were playing it more reserved.

Miss Cooper – **Judi Champion**

I always look forward to seeing what character Judi will be playing in each production. Miss Cooper was handled superbly; efficiently running the hotel but also caring about the residents. The hidden complexity of this character (typical Rattigan) was performed proficiently and naturally. Posture and movement was precise as befits the efficient, business like Miss Cooper with clear dialogue varying with the reactions to each of the characters showing warmth and compassion, especially with Anne. Well done Judi. I loved the little touch of Miss Cooper turning off the lights as she left the stage at the end.

Best wishes

Gilli Morris-Monk
Regional Representative
NODA London District 10

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