

# Wychwood Players

*A Small Affair* (a misnomer as it had a large cast of 17 characters) was written by the late *Bob Larbey of The Good Life and As Time Goes By* fame. **Mandyrae Jessey** bravely took on the role of Director.

This production kept the comedy to a believable level. The stand-out moments included **John Witts** with his lively un-pastorized portrayal of an outspoken plebeian electrician (**Harry**) and his coupling with **Elizabeth-Rae Large (Ada)** in a delightful disco-dance. There was also much amusement caused by **Rose Hartley** (as Hollywood "star" **Mona**) when her diva-like behaviour ended with a tumble off the bed. **Phillip Croxson** as a tipsy old thespian, **Terry**, raised laughs with his emphatic limp (a Croxson limp sounds like the result of wearing ill-fitting Crocks!).

It was heartening to see the enthusiasm of newcomers **Hazel Hughes**, **Janice Collins** and **Jill Mavin** as they made their effective debuts on this stage along with a most realistic security man played by **Stephen Wood**. **Ralph Wears** played the hapless director, **Guy Green**, in an appropriately ill-starred way in tandem with **Rachel Read** who showed her ennui as his long-suffering assistant.

Everyone in this production, including the unseen backstage crew, provided an entertaining and palatable appetizer before the second half of the evening which, in contrast, featured only three characters as *Another Fine Mess* by *Gillian Plowman* told the story of a Laurel and Hardy tribute act. This seemingly esoteric subject for drama surprisingly formed the basis for a vibrant stage experience.

The expertise of the Director, **Mandyrae Jessey** – again, elicited a superb response from her cast with **Richard J Hartley** (as **Stephen** – **Stan Laurel**) revelling in his accurate deployment of a host of **Laurel's** mannerisms plus facial expressions and, most notably, **Mark Jessey** undoubtedly giving the performance of his life as **Phil (Oliver Hardy)**. By no means overshadowed by her co-stars **Vanessa Hartley** was utterly convincing in her role of **Stephen's** girlfriend, **Meg**. Is this the start of the Hartley acting dynasty?



For a one-act play *Another Fine Mess* was crammed full with attributes ranging from some delightful song-and-dance move to contrasting scenes of unbelievable poignancy from **Mark Jessey** in his deeply-felt portrayal of **Phil's** underlying sadness. His skillful playing was matched by **Richard J Hartley** and the moment when these two shared an emotional hug was touchingly memorable.

The lighting and sound crew, respectively **Tony Mellerick** and **Anthony Gofton**, made their own effective contribution to this faultless production.

Massive credit to **Mandyrae Jessey** for starting with and ably controlling an ensemble piece with a large cast and then culminating with an emotional three-hander to capture the best of the **Wychwood Players**.

**John Drew**

August-September 201