

Wychwood Players.

Laburnum Grove by J.B. Priestley.

The Wychwood Players' latest production gave us a chance to witness the manners and attitudes of pre-war 1930's English suburbia as dramatized by the noted writer J. B. Priestley in his early play Laburnum Grove.

In her lucid programme notes the Director, Hazel Hughes, amusingly justified her admiration of this gentle comedy which, after over 70 years, still has the bite of a Yorkshire terrier.

There were no weak links in this production which succeeded in holding the audience's rapt attention despite the inevitable time it took to set up the characters and plot. As a bonus, the final scene raced along with zip-wire speed.

The plot centred around whether an ostensibly respectable business-man in the paper industry was actually a forger of banknotes and bonds. This enigmatic man was George Radfern, played by Aram Gregory in his usual towering way as befitting a character who could be either a master criminal or simply a dull patriarch. As Bernard Baxley (Radfern's brother-in-law), Phillip Crosson, revelled gleefully in his role as a returning ex-pat scrounger with a liking for his host's cigarettes; even bananas had appeal! Top marks, too, for his spectacles which were, in fact, spectacular.

Rose Hartley as Radfern's wife, Dorothy, was a delight and her efforts at keeping up appearances almost seemed like a pre-cursor of a blooming Hyacinth Bucket - pronounced "Bouquet".

Appropriately, Dorothy's daughter, Elsie, was played by Rose's real-life daughter-in-law, Rachel Hartley, who accurately displayed the innocence of a 1930's young girl and was an attractive foil to her car-dealer boy friend, Harold Russ, played by a very spirited Will Young.

Joanna McKerlie gave her customary accomplished performance as Lucy, the rather un-sympathetic and frumpish wife of Bernard Baxley.

An inspector did call and Ralph Wears as Inspector Stack was so convincing that he could have stepped straight out of the Scotland Yard of yesteryear.

Steve Colter efficiently played Joe Fletten as a dodgy dealer with a strange penchant for the off-stage greenhouse.

It was a neat theatrical trick to introduce the late arrival of Sergeant Morris and this part gave Mark Jessey a chance to sparkle briefly with his cameo appearance.

This production showed many adroit touches from the Crew who were responsible for the set, sound and lighting.

An interesting rather than ground-breaking play, Laburnum Grove deservedly received the full Wychwood Players' treatment with Hazel Hughes directing most effectively. Her first production for the Players must be rated an unqualified artistic success.

John Drew

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