

The Vicar of Dibley

Here beginneth the lesson: stage versions of popular television sitcoms appeal to audiences happy to re-engage with old friends. But to succeed, the actors need to be more than carbon copies of the originals. (Anyone remember carbon copies?)

So the Wychwood Players brought their accomplished skills to provide an evening of gentle humour while presenting the issue of sexism in the world of religion, where a female vicar was once regarded as some sort of clerical error! The Vicar of Dibley is a stage play by Ian Gower and Paul Carpenter adapted from the TV series by Richard Curtis and Paul Mayhew-Archer and the cast brought a new light to shine on a familiar story.

Clare Brown was an imposing figure in the title role and established her character with a faultless performance. She was equally at home whether dealing with the attitudes of the Parish Council or conversing more intimately with Alice Tinker, played here with sentimental naivety by Rachel Hartley. The Council scenes tended to be dominated by Mark Jessey as a notable facsimile of the original Jim Trott with his strings of "no, no, no, no.....yes" and luckily he was never inclined to cut o his no's to spite his face!

Phillip Croxson was gentle and touching as the pedantic Parish Clerk, while Ralph Wears successfully showed us how boorish David Horton the Chairman actually was. He arrogantly tried to control his dim son Hugo who was played by Richar Dreyer with charming guilelessness. A newcomer to the Players, Steve Colter, was most effective as Owen, and his talk of digestion problems brought a reminder of unsavoury motions during the rather static meeting scenes. Rachel Read played Letitia whose knitting skills surpassed her dubious culinary capabilities. Although the scenes between Alice and Hugo betrayed a high degree of innocence, the play somehow culminated in an on-stage wedding. The transformation of the set from living room/Village Hall to marital venue was a conversion of a Damascene level and was a huge credit to the Stage Manager, Tony Mellerick and the Backstage Crew. The Director, Dudley Thompson, meticulously controlled a production which succeeded in turning a venerable television sitcom into a vibrant piece of live theatre.

Once again the teamwork and professionalism of every member of this presentation deserves commendation: Praise be, th Wychwood Players.
Here endeth the lesson.

John Drew

The editor was sent an email from a clearly entranced Catherine Hitchens who, despite not enjoying the original TV series, commented that "Every one of the local actors caught the speech intonations, the facial expressions, the body language, even the stage personas, not to mention the complete craziness of many of the situations".

Photos by David Trollope



June – July 201