

Review

Comfort and Joy

By Mike Harding

Produced by Irene McCartney and Pete Grocock

Production: November 2007

RoCo brought the house down with Mike Harding's *Comfort and Joy* staged at St Andrew's Church hall from November 22 to November 24.

It's Christmas at the Duggans' – Margaret (Andrea Varnavides), Martin (Chris Hoyle), daughter Helen (Emma Slater), and Margaret's long-john and Father Christmas gown clad curmudgeon of an uncle, Goff (Pete Grocock).

Goff is reconciled with daughter Fiona (Clare King). Thirty years ago she fled to Australia, pregnant by local married Lothario, now her husband, Jimmy (Darren Slater). Goff cannot forgive Jimmy's not returning his saw first.

Margaret's other daughter, successful-in-the-London-arts-scene Kathy (Kim Tomlin) arrives with a pair of incontinent cats and a doo-doo splattered posh boy friend, Crispin (Robert Butler).

Retired accountant Chapman and wife Monica (Brian Marston and Andrea Wells) call in for drinks. They see angels, who are the aliens who once abducted them.

After Christmas Day mass, presents, and a rescued meal, Pat (Pauline Pitman) visits with her thuggish toy boy (Richard Waterfield) and children (Faye Henderson and Alice Rayner). She denounces Jimmy as her errant and bigamous husband.

Fiona is distraught. Jimmy doesn't care. Pat goes. Crispin drinks the lemonade, not realising it is poteen given to Goff by a local priest. Crispin keels over. That's Christmas at the Duggans'!

The acting was mostly well judged and engrossing. Andrea Varnavides won hearts as the long-suffering Margaret. Emma Slater expressed well the quiet frustration of the girl who stayed home.

Chris Hoyle's Irish accent as builder Martin sounded right, though he appeared a little young for the part. Robert Butler was a good new addition to RoCo, as were others.

Pauline Pitman's brassy and outraged Pat was splendid. As a curmudgeon, Pete Grocock should be on TV!

The excellent back stage and front of house teams enabled the cast to give their best. The lighting, by John Burgess, and sound, by Jonathan Murray, were well done.

Irene McCartney produced and directed, stepping in when Pete Grocock had to take over an acting part. She did a wonderful job.

Ian MacFadyen