

Review

Ladies of Spirit

By Georgina Reed

Produced by Pauline Pitman

Production: March 2003

Live theatre! You can't beat it. RoCo's 77th production proved to be one of the most hilarious.

An all female cast led superbly by Pauline Pitman (producing for RoCo for the first time, and surely not the last!) brought to life a varied collection of real characters. The unfeeling headmistress, Miss Rowe – understandably known as “Hard Rowe” – was played to scary perfection by Vivien Hughes. Her senior mistress, Miss Maudesley, changing from a meek and mild, timid creature to a woman given renewed confidence and a chance of some fun, gave Margaret Jowett the opportunity to display her considerable acting skills, which she did with great aplomb.

What can you say about Doreen Galbraith and Andrea Varnavides that hasn't been said before? Words from the play – like “filibuster”, “omniscient”, “flavescent”, even “putrescent” – spring to mind, but probably are not appropriate! They were superb as the late Misses Pye, returning to the school to make sure the planned changes did not take place, and in the end seeing that Miss Rowe got her come-uppance. One could feel the effort it took for Hatty (played by Doreen) to materialize, and the frustration that Matty (Andrea) felt, not quite able to make it.

One admired the inspiration in creating the character of the Grand Duchess Anna of Schneswig-Hufstein (try saying that and keeping your face straight!).

The rather common and truculent Mrs Emmett, single mother of the school's brightest pupil, Susan, was wonderfully portrayed by Bronwen Robinson, and commanded real sympathy when her daughter went missing.

We mention these five ladies first, although they were last “in order of appearance”, because they have all been involved with excellence in RoCo for many years (and we hope many more).

The other cast members are new, or relatively new, to our boards, and it is really good to see that RoCo continues to attract new members who give polished performances.

Emma MacFadyen made a delightful school secretary, fascinated by words, her head buried in the dictionary. It was a joy to see such an assured and confident performance by this former member of Junior RoCo. Well done, Emma.

Shona Jones played, with sympathy and pathos, Jane Cox, a young teacher who cared for both her colleagues and her pupils, and we were with her all the way when she was driven to bravely speak her mind and tell Miss Rowe exactly what she thought of her.

She contrasted well with the gushing, scheming May Danvers, skillfully played by Kathy White, who was led by Miss Rowe into trying to frame Susan for robbery in order to get her expelled. Not a nice person, and certainly not a believer in the school motto, “Keep the Truth”.

Last, but by no means least, was Mrs Thorpe, a teacher of the old school with a wider view and understanding, but looking for a quiet life. Brenda Porter rose splendidly to the challenge of portraying this teacher, who, apart from her pupils, had her family life to consider.

It is worth mentioning the author, Georgina Reid, who not only created such characters for the stage but also made us feel as if we knew the unseen characters – Susan, Alderman Pursey and his daughter Angela, Brunhilde and the Pargeters!

All in all, an excellent production of an excellent play. But, as ever, such a production relies on a whole team – from props to prompt, stage management and crew, scenery, lighting, sound, wardrobe, make-up, as well as front of house management, licensee, box office, publicity, refreshments and sweet stall. This time a team of well over 30 people aged from 13 to over 80 worked together. Congratulations to them all.

Live theatre needs and deserves a live audience. If you were one of those unfortunately unable to book a ticket this time – you missed a real treat. Do make sure you don't miss the next production in November.

Thank you, RoCo, for another three nights of wonderful entertainment.