

LOOK BACK IN ANGER by John Osborne

(560 words)

directed by Amanda Knott

a Creative Cow production touring through England

April 7th - June 18th

Vigorous revival of iconic drama

4 hearts

Amanda Knott has directed a rip-roaring revival of Osborne's first successful play, presented by Creative Cow Theatre Company, rightly accentuating the raw emotion of Osborne's script. The energy from all performers sustains both tension & attention as freshly perhaps, as at The Royal Court Theatre in London 55 years ago.

A lively Tiverton audience attended the town's spacious New Hall for the company's very first public, preview performance (not intended for so early a review). The good patrons found on stage, a set suitably cluttered as a bed-sitting room tenanted by disconsolate young persons. Mismatched, worn out furniture is hemmed in, not by walls, but symbolic iron bars, distinctly the sort that imprison savage animals in zoos, (or did, in the 1950s). Clothes and numerous shoes hang from the bars and the floor is littered with fading newspapers.

The original period is recreated in its essential mid 20th Century domestic drudgery, lacking techno-gadgetry, except for a radio and the electric iron. As Osborne intended, the iron, enthroned on its ironing board, stands at centre-stage like the grandiose actor-manager of old-time repertory theatres, demanding respectful adulation from hand-maidens (no gender equality in 1956) whilst its supporting cast of lesser actors, orbit around it.

It is said Osborne was irritated by the press dubbing him "Angry Young Man" but from the tirades he put into Jimmy Porter's mouth what else did he expect? Occasionally the volume of Piers Wehner, portraying Jimmy Porter most enthusiastically, is almost ear-splitting. His rapid and loud outbursts alternate with subdued responses from Alison, Porter's cruelly humiliated wife, and from Cliff, the couple's lodger who like Alison, is inexplicably devoted to the unappreciative Jimmy.

Katherine Senior performs a beautifully studied, convincing Alison that invokes shed loads of audience sympathy, just from the way she stoops under the constant verbal beatings inflicted by her insensitive, arrogant husband. Her patient replies to his unjustified jibes, 'tho' quiet, are clear, while playful diversions with her more amiable friend, Cliff, are delightful relief from Porter's oppressive bullying.

Wehner's admirable portrayal will doubtless mellow during this fairly long tour, from the actor's present, demonstrative fireworks into the character's more deeply motivated eruptions of long gestated frustrations. The former style can become irritating whereas the latter will impress.

Jonathan Parish is too tall for the "little Welshman" Cliff, but he shrugs off that textual anomaly. Parish will also, soon show more depth of feeling once he settles fully into the role. Meanwhile, they all have to counter the overbearing might of Wehner's magnificent Jimmy Porter.

One who has no difficulty in countering him is Lizzy Dive as Alison's friend, Helena. In an assured characterisation, Ms Dive brings the first ray of hope into the doomed household. Her self esteem, wit and assertive confidence is welcome to an audience, so engrossed as to be almost ready to jump onto the stage to rescue Alison, the damsel in distress. But Helena calls in another to attempt that office; Alison's father, Colonel Redfern, is nicely played with subtle humour by Jack Hlland.

Sound design by Richard Price is entirely satisfactory and includes all too brief pieces of The Lark Ascending by Vaughan Williams. Stage Manager, Lighting Designer and Technical Operator are all conjoined in the capable young personage of Jason Addison who helps make this production a thoroughly professional presentation. For tour dates go to www.creativecow.co.uk