

The Farmer's Wife, New Theatre, Exeter – August 27th, 2010

A merry glint in his eye and with natural stage presence, actor Tony Beard revels in a role seemingly tailor-made for this Devonshire broadcaster and entertainer. As warm-hearted Farmer Sweetland, a widower in search of a wife, The Wag from Widecombe brings authenticity to this welcome revival of a comedy written by Devon author Eden Phillpotts in 1916.

With inspired and imaginative casting, Creative Cow's director Amanda Knott places actor and broadcaster Douglas Mounce, resplendent in frilled apron and mob-cap as Sweetland's bustling housekeeper Araminta Dench, a role he plays with sincerity and gentle humour. Supported by a strong cast, they establish instantaneous rapport.

Scenes of hilarity and general mayhem progress at pace played out in pantomime style, in the comfortable kitchen of Applegarth Farm, and across the valley at Miss Tapper's genial tea-party where marriage is in the air. With strong direction the actors make the most of some wildly eccentric characters and the gentle Devonshire dialect.

Katherine Senior impresses with a trio of roles, each carefully

observed, played with confidence and vocal variety. Avowed spinster Thirza Tapper, is a lady of impeccable taste and carefully modulated voice: Strong-minded young Petronell holds firm views on marriage, but her quieter sister Sibley is the first to get her man.

Bowler-hat in hand Farmer Sweetland woos fox-hunting Widow Wendeatt (Katy Baker) and outlandish Post-mistress Mary Hearn (Jo Loosemore). But in Little Silver seeking a wife is an important occupation. Edward Ferrow's earnest George Smerdon competes with several eager young swains for the young ladies' attentions. With foot-tapping live music, this fine Devonshire fare is offered until September 11. (Box office 01392 277189)

Western Morning News
Anne Broom