

Estuary Players

www.topshamestuaryplayers.org.uk

NEWSLETTER NOVEMBER 2011

Congratulations to everyone involved in “The Threepenny Opera”! - a very enjoyable and successful week. It was good to receive a rewarding amount of positive feedback from our audiences - always a challenge when presenting such a bold piece of theatre! The young and very talented members of the cast were a joy to have around - and the ‘old timers’ amongst us really appreciated their energy and commitment – quite rejuvenating in fact! The After Show party, held at Chris and Pippa’s home, was a great way to end the week, to say our thanks and ‘put the play to bed’, and then home for a well earned rest- until the next time! Here is a copy of the first night review:

Look Out! Macheath’s Back in Topsham Town

‘What is the robbery of a bank compared to the founding of a bank?’ ‘Money rules the world.’ These two lines from the Threepenny Opera, composed in 1928, dispelled any doubts that the first-night audience might have about the topicality of the latest, ambitious production by the Estuary Players, which is directed with panache by Ian Potts.

As Bill Pattinson’s Street Singer intoned the famous ballad of Mack the Knife he moved onstage into the circle of actors representing the low life created by John Gay in his Beggars’ Opera, now relocated to the time of Queen Victoria’s coronation. The range of colourful but by no means shabby costumes worn by the almost genteel criminals, beggars and ladies of easy virtue reflect Brecht’s view that corruption is inherent in supposedly respectable bourgeois society and its capitalist system. Alan Caig and Maggie Bourgein’s Peachums run their begging business with ruthless efficiency, and Macheath prised one of the first night’s surprisingly few laughs from the audience when he declared his intention to give up crime and go in for banking, as a safer and more profitable occupation.

The appearance of Macheath as an almost bashful, lovelorn youth seemed at odds with the list of his crimes that include murder and rape, but this contrast can be defended as a Brechtian ‘defamiliarising’ of the figure. After a hesitant start, Cameron Lemmer grew into the role and came emphatically into his own in the final, powerful prison scenes. Similarly unorthodox is Tilly Webster as a fetching female Filch, doubling also as the mounted messenger from the Queen in the finale.

The Peachums performed their songs with great verve, and the two main rivals for Mac’s affection, Polly Peachum (Josie Kemp) and Lucy Brown (Kate Wannell) were also in very good voice, though their performing style veered towards conventional

musical as opposed to a more severe Lotte Lenya manner. The self-assertion in Lucy's rejection of respectable suitors was weakened by the translation of her 'Nein!', which ends each verse of her song in Brecht's original, as 'I'm sorry' in this Marc Blitzstein adaptation. Polly's Pirate-Jenny impersonation was imaginatively staged, but as she was swung through the air the vocal emphasis on her vengeful triumph over her oppressors was likewise softened. In the role of Macheath's other love, Jenny, Angela Wallwork articulated the disillusion of the Solomon song with nuanced emotional power.

The lively supporting cast, too numerous to name individually here, portrayed an array of social types: not only beggars, whores and gangsters, but clergy, jailers and police - gangster Mac's friendship with London's police chief (add your own comment), his old army pal Tiger Brown, played by Anthony Morris, is celebrated in the aggressive comrades-in-arms duet.

In his notes on this piece Brecht makes life difficult for actors and audience by his usual requirement that empathy should be avoided so as not to allow emotional involvement in the action to get in the way of his political message. But as usual his plot, here in particular the love-intrigue, militates against this, and so he reinforces the message with songs, captions and other devices, including the final plot-twist. In this production advantage is taken also of the opportunity offered by the scene where the beggars are gathered to demonstrate before Victoria's coronation outside Westminster Abbey.

Throughout the performance the vivid back-projection of collages and contemporary photographs illustrating poverty, corruption and the gap between haves and have-nots, as well as of backdrops to the scenes, all brilliantly designed by Phil Keen and Rhod Cooper (one example is on the cover of the programme, reproduced on the company's website) add immeasurably to both the visual impact of the action and the message it embodies. Underpinning the action is of course the crowning glory of the piece, Kurt Weill's score, splendidly interpreted and performed at the keyboard by Musical Director Ben Beeson.

Alan Robertshaw
9th November 2011

March 2012 Production –Director Howard

As explained in the October newsletter, Howard has put forward 3 plays for consideration. There will be an opportunity to read extracts from these at a meeting arranged for Tuesday 22nd November, in the Malthouse 7.30p.m. Here is a brief 'taster' from Howard:

The Cemetery Club, a comedy set in New York, features three Jewish women of very different characters who have been friends since young ladies and, together with their respective spouses, belonged to the same social circle. Now they are widows and meet

every month at the cemetery to pay their respects to their departed husbands. Then their lives are made more interesting when an eligible widower arrives on the scene...

4F, 1M all 50+.

The Farndale Avenue Housing Estate Townswomen's Guild Dramatic Society's Production of Macbeth is one in the series of Farndale farces first presented at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe. Mrs Reece, the chairman, leads the proceedings of what turns out to be a fairly disastrous evening for the society. This is a difficult play because actors have to play convincingly 'bad' actors and technical 'problems' with set, sound and lighting have to be executed so as not to turn the whole thing into pantomime.

6F 3M all ages.

Brassed Off is a stage play based on the film of the same name. Set in a Yorkshire mining village, it relates a moving, but at times funny, story with two strands - the imminent closure of the colliery and the progress of the colliery band to the National Championships.

4F 6M plus nurses and bailiffs. The ages are important. 3M are 50+, 1M 40-50 and 1M 25-35. 2F 50+ 1F 40-50 and 1F 25-35. It also requires 1M 12-16 (The play takes place in his memory. He was 8 when the action took place but he is recalling it with hindsight). And obviously a brass band!

DO PLEASE COME ALONG. It's usually a very relaxing and enjoyable evening

DIARY DATE - THE BIKE SHED 27TH November 2011

Our own, our very own Maggie Bourgein (last seen treading the boards as an amazing Mrs.Peachum!) will be performing at the Bike Shed, Exeter very shortly - here are more details from Maggie:

Maggie Bourgein and Flip Webster, (whose daughter played Filch etc in The Threepenny Opera), are doing a 15-minute segment entitled 'Women of an Uncertain Age' in Scratch at the Bike Shed on 27th November, starting at 7.30. These Scratch events are taking place on Sundays throughout November. To quote from the Bike Shed's leaflet, 'Scratch is all about helping new and emerging artists by giving them a platform where they can take their experiments out of the rehearsal room and place them in front of an audience. Scratch will purposefully mix different artists and disciplines together.' Maggie and Flip would be the first to admit they are neither new or emerging, but their double act is! The audience is invited to give feedback after each short performance, (there are 4 in all), and, by way of encouragement, the bar stays open throughout - and tickets cost only £3!

CHRISTMAS DINNER –

This is now booked and we look forward to getting together in the very relaxing environment of The Café - many thanks to Howard and Chris for arranging this

best wishes

Avril