

NORTH ESSEX THEATRE FULL LENGTH PLAY FESTIVAL 2024-2025

BATS

Brief Encounter, directed by James Wetherall
Adjudicated by Amanda Powell, assisted by Keith Cummings
03/07/2025

FRONT OF HOUSE

As always at BATS, we received a warm welcome and were given our programmes. All the staff were friendly, inviting, and helpful throughout the evening. The programme was very informative and gave a clear indication of the production style. I especially liked the story synopsis.

SETTING/PROPS/STAGE MANAGEMENT

The basic stage with just the large 'theatre style' white curtains and some bare wooden table and chairs had me intrigued and wondering what the Directors vision was for this play with music. I was not disappointed. The use of the white curtains for both the cinema and its use to zone areas throughout was an effective and creative idea. I think my favourite use of the curtain was in the restaurant scene, so simple, but so effective. The station tearoom was a marvel. It had all the correct period features and props, and I felt completely transported back to that era. Well done!

LIGHTING AND SOUND/MUSIC

The lighting was very well executed. I could always see all faces clearly and it was nice natural mood lighting so that it fitted in with every differing scene. The music was lovely and the way it often played throughout a scene like a movie underscore was so nice. There were a few times when it was too loud, and I couldn't really hear the performers (although I believe this may not have been helped due to a faulty mic here and there). The sound effects were very good and well timed (especially loved the splashing scene SFX). I would advise lowering rain SFX during a scene and leaving it as an undercurrent before slowly bringing it back up rather than cutting it out, as it can be a little jarring for an audience when it stops then suddenly comes back on again later in a scene. The use of the projector as the cinema was such a lovely and clever idea, however I must admit both Keith and I were a little confused when the actual film of Brief Encounter came on and ran for quite some time. Had it been a different movie from the same period and/or possibly not run for quite as long, I think that may have stopped some of the confusion and set the scene a little better. The use of all the other backgrounds etc. were well thought out and very effective.

DIRECTION

James Wetherall clearly had a vision for this production and definitely succeeded in his task. There were so many clever moments, as well as strong blocking, scene changes and character placements. The direction given for the acting was obviously good as actors were emotive, gave us plenty of light and shade with so many lovely facial expressions and believable performances. Keith and I honestly couldn't really fault the 'play' section of this production at all. However, we both felt that the musical portion of the play was a little lacking in something. The music was lovely, although obviously not a selection of the more memorable musical numbers from Coward's large repertoire; but I felt the choreography was a little timid and the actors

often didn't look comfortable. It may be just a personal choice on my part, but the play is so good that I felt the musical part wasn't really needed. It didn't 'add' anything to the play, in fact, apart from the scene/song where Laura and Roger change their clothes, it tended to stop the flow of the play somewhat as it didn't tend to have any great correlation to what was happening in the play.

COSTUME

Costumes were all well-chosen and perfectly suited to the period of the production, from Beryl's pinny to Laura's beautiful green suit. All the accessories (hats, shoes, bags, suits, coats etc.) were spot on and really helped capture the era.

PERFORMANCES

PIPPA REVELL (Laura Jesson):

A wonderfully gentle, natural and believable performance. You gave us a perfectly clipped thirties/forties accent with great diction throughout. Excellent use of pace and light and shade and your interactions with Alec Harvey really drew the audience in. A performer who really understood her character. A pleasure to watch.

ROGER WEELEY (Alec Harvey):

Another nice, gentle performance, with good projection, diction and emotion. You were very believable as a man torn between love and loyalty and created some lovely tender moments with Laura Jesson. Also, bravo to the pair of you for managing to take off and then put on your clothes on stage to a timed piece of music, no easy feat!

TERESA FRASER (Myrtle Baggot)

A wonderful performance from Teresa. This is a lady who knows her comic timing and is a strong character actress. The audience immediately knew the kind of dominant yet rather saucy/flirtatious woman she was and it was amusing to see her interactions with both Albert and Beryl. Her great timing and understanding of her character gave the other cast members a lot to work with.

ALAN JONES (Albert Godby):

What a fun and sweet character to play! He was a great paring with Myrtle bringing lots of light relief to an otherwise emotive production. Lovely job.

KEIRAN STONE (Stanley):

Another sweet and cheeky character to play. Keiran did very well portraying a young lad in love with the somewhat unsatisfied Beryl. Just be careful not to run your words together and slow down a little.

ELIZABETH DIAMOND (Beryl Waters):

Beryl is somewhat of a feisty and unsatisfied young lady. I loved Elizabeth's opening scene when trying to find the cat, it was so well done with excellent comic timing. Your facial expressions were also fabulous throughout.

BEN COOK (Fred Jesson):

This was an actor that I wish I could have seen more of. Ben had a strong yet gentle voice and portrayed the part of the disinterested husband to perfection.

ANYA FROST & JESSICA EARL (Margaret & Bobbie)

These young ladies were excellent with great diction and acting throughout. They were completely believable as the children of Laura and Fred and created a lovely family tableau. Great job.

STEPHEN LYNN/BILL (Ryan Maslen)

Some beautiful singing from Ryan as Bill the soldier, it was my favourite number in the whole show. A nice portrayal of the drunk soldier Bill, playing off Jonnie nicely. Stephen's character was very different by contrast; he was clearly a friend to Alec but was clearly disappointed at Alec's behaviour when he and Laura were almost caught 'in flagrante delicto'! Be careful not to rely on the use of projection to portray emotion, instead a little more vocal light and shade and facial expression would have enhanced your performance.

KATIE HINSON (Dolly Messiter):

Not an easy job to keep the constant chatter, clipped accent, comic timing and character acting going, especially when you only have the briefest of moments to convey the type of character you are playing. I think Katie hit the characterization nail on the head! Well done.

LAURA PITCHELL & ROSIE RUDLAND (Hermione & Mary):

I really enjoyed your clear, well projected and acted cameo roles as both Hermione and Mary and the Cinema Ushers.

ENSEMBLE

A special mention to Jonnie (whose name isn't in the programme I think due to last minute casting changes), whose acting was fantastic!

PRODUCTION

This production was clever, slick, fluid, well-rehearsed, full of light and shade and good parings. The set & lighting was very effective, and although I wasn't personally a fan of the musical part of this play the musicians sounded lovely and the singing was good. Costumes and props were absolutely perfect; scene transitions clean and smooth and the characters all well portrayed by the cast who gave us clear diction, great 30's clipped vocals, lots of emotional and comical moments. The direction was clear, blocking was strong, and the overall vision was very clear and on the whole worked very well.

I found this production a pleasure to watch, and the entire cast and crew should be very proud of their vision and achievements. Nicely done BATS.

Best wishes

Amanda Powell (NETG Adjudicator)