

Breezeblock Park

Date: 8th June 2018

Society: Brantham Amateur Theatrical Society

Venue: Brantham Village Hall

Type of Production: Play

Director: Angie Heath

Report: Author: Hazel Hole

This amusing comedy, written by Willy Russell, is one of his lesser known plays and is set in the 1970s on a council housing estate in Liverpool. It featured a cast of 9 characters, the majority of whom were on stage for most of the time. All had mastered the Liverpool accent incredibly well. The action took place over the Christmas period, in first, Betty's house and then in Reeny's house. Fiona Morris, playing Betty, put in a strong and compelling performance as the family matriarch displaying very strict ideas on family life. Her wig and makeup were very true to the style of the 70s. Gordon Prior, playing Syd, Betty's hapless and easily influenced husband interpreted his character very well. Sandra, played with great skill by Sophie Mercer, was their daughter, railing against the confines of her family life and challenging her parents way of doing things in this somewhat male chauvinist northern society of the 70s.

Keith Raby, playing Tommy, Betty's brother who was constantly inebriated, played the role with great enthusiasm and style. Tommy's wife, Vera, played by Teresa Fraser, was a rather meek and mild character who was an excellent foil to Tommy's exuberance. Betty's sister, Reeny, played by Lesley Mercer, and her husband, Ted, played by Richard Heath, clearly had ambitions to move upwards in life and were both very good in their roles. Ted, in particular, tried to give the impression of being more highly educated and intelligent than the rest of the family but met his match in Sandra's boyfriend, Tim. Mark Hinson took this role of a student with very modern ideas (including not marrying pregnant Sandra) which did not please the traditional family until a trip to the pub seemed to foster greater understanding and tolerance of new ideas. Reeny and Ted's son, John, was played by Ben Wilkinson who had a great interpretation of this part as an overly 'mothered' son, dominated and put down by both parents but straining to get away from the restrictions of the family. However, there were a few times when it was difficult to hear Ben and he needs to work on this aspect of his performance.

The play was directed by Angie Heath who has previously directed a number of productions for this talented group. She told me of the particular challenges of the small stage at the venue and the required set changes. However, with careful and imaginative use of props (Lisa Butler) and set design and construction (Phil Burns, Geoff Hewitson, Dave Mercer), all managed by Richard Heath, the set was changed seamlessly during the interval from Betty's house (act one) to Reeny's house (act two.)

Lighting was ably designed by Clinton Bratchell and operated by Arjan van Heuveln and Ed Bach and was very appropriate for the set, as was the sound (Ian Southgate). Prompts were listed in the programme but everyone seemed to be word perfect which, given the amount of words to be learnt, coupled with maintaining the accent, was remarkable. Tina Burns was responsible for the Front of House and the costumes and all these were clearly representative of the 70s period.

This was a great performance by talented actors, making good use of the stage and highlighting the somewhat turbulent changes faced by traditional society in the 70s.

Well done to everyone involved. It was a most enjoyable evening.