



ROSE BOWL ADJUDICATION

NAME OF COMPANY: **THE KELVIN PLAYERS
THEATRE COMPANY**

NAME OF PRODUCTION: **‘BRIEF ENCOUNTER’**

VENUE: Kelvin Players Studio

DATE: Thursday, 13 October 2016

ADJUDICATOR: Barbara Smith

PRESENTATION

This ‘Play with Music’ is a discrete product from The Kneehigh Theatre Company and the Kelvin production faithfully followed the intentions of the original production with a multimedia fusion of film projections, Song and Dance, and a mixture of dramatic genre using both ‘bitter sweet’ Realism and Comedy Farce. It is a challenge on many levels both with the material and performance.

SET including FURNITURE & PROPS

The split set with Station Tea Room SR and Jesson’s Home SL and with a raised platform running along the back with a large projection screen, was effective in accommodating all the changes of venue including Stephen Lynn’s flat, Royal Hotel, and Boating Hut. I felt that this set was very basic and certainly looked very rundown, particularly the Station Tea Room and Buffet Bar Counter, and I realised the piano had to be set somewhere and this served as a shelf area for the bottles and cake stands. The covering below the platform appeared to be a hurriedly fixed and creased flimsy brown fabric but perhaps this was intentional. The Jesson House had a lovely ‘30’s’ period fire-place set against a good choice of wallpaper, and two fine, Art Deco armchairs, and this all reflected a fine sense of the era.

Excellent bentwood chairs and small tables in the Buffet and again for the Kardomah and Hotel, and I admired the fine large enamel teapot alongside basic cups and saucers laid on the counter. Fine section of a boat, good array of cakes on glass stands and drinks bottles, and Stanley's chocolate carrier. All hand props in excellent period style. This was a basic set, affording fine discrete acting areas which were well-defined.

STAGE MANAGEMENT

This was conducted largely by the performers and often in a very tongue-in-cheek, stylised manner, but the flow of action was smooth. All the Sound, Lighting, and Effects cuing were excellent, as all was spot on, particularly the crucial visuals which often had to be projected with precise timing. I was bemused by the train steam appearing as a spurting puff half way up a flat whereas it would have been more appropriate for the steam to have appeared from the bottom with a steady build up more appropriately as from a Steam Train. However, a well-considered input.

LIGHTING, EFFECTS & SOUND

The Lighting Design was very good and fine use made to highlight the 3 main acting areas with discreet spots for more intimate scenes. I liked the use of Amber for emotional scenes such as meeting of Laura and Alec and the warm scenes in the Jesson's home, and also for some of the sentimental songs. There was a good use of spot highlighting small scenes such as Stanley with Yo-Yo on the Platform. Fine robo-gobos as in Tango sequence.

The projections of still and moving visuals was first class and all perfectly timed, the use of a large screen made these very effective, and the brief images of the crashing wave when Laura is emotional and reflecting, were superbly timed. On a very minor point I felt the boating sequence went on a little too long, but all else – perfection. These projections added greatly to both location and atmosphere.

The Sound Effects were excellent and again perfectly timed. Good period bell sound denoting incoming train and the train effects again all in period. The timing of the recorded music again excellent, as indeed was the excellent live music input. A first class piece of technical input.

COSTUME, WIGS, & MAKE-UP

Again this element was excellent with all costumes reflecting period and status. I particularly appreciated the Ladies' hats and handbags, and the uniforms for both the Station Staff and the Ushers/Usherettes were perfect. Excellently observed hairstyling with careful hair partings for Alec, Fred, and Stephen and with nicely slicked down 'Brilliantined' hair – also the 2 Soldiers. Laura with a superbly 'rolled' and higher fronted hair style, Myrtle with a good wig and Beryl also in good style as were the stylish leisurely Middle Class Ladies. Laura had fine changes of costume with a stylish jacket and dress for her meal with Alec in the Hotel and her 'sensible' suit for travelling to town

complete with basket for shopping. Beryl with fine period apron and lovely touch of white socks and Myrtle with her shorter skirts and tie-fronted blouses. Good flat cap for Stanley and Trilby and formal suit for Alec – both making period ‘class’ statements. All excellently observed to give a fine sense of the late’30’s and making a fine visual impact.

DIRECTION

As your Director mentioned in her notes, I also had not seen this production by ‘Kneehigh’ and after reading the script did research work on previous productions. The Kelvin production appeared to follow faithfully the tenets of the original production and was successful in presenting Emma Rice’s adaptation.

As with Kneehigh there was a jolly period atmosphere on entering the Auditorium with excellent Ukelele playing and singing of popular songs of the era, and very ably assisted by Ushers/Usherettes with energised song and movement, and all creating a fine light-hearted atmosphere and with the audience joining the singing. Throughout the musical composition and backing input was excellent, and although the singing was variable with both pitch and projection, there was some strong singing input and I was particularly moved with the singing and grouping of the 2 Soldiers and Fred with the ‘Go Slow Johnny’ piece, with both the quality of singing and projection of emotion. I did not fully appreciate the cast harmony rendering of Rachmaninoff Concerto No 2 and, although the harmony was effective and despite knowing it was to be used, I did not immediately recognise the piece.

The dance input was very good especially the Tango with Laura and Alec and again the sexy input of Myrtle and Albert. Beryl well pitched and motivated in ‘Mad About the Boy’ and Alec ‘Room with A View,’ also well pitched and excellently stylised. The Company input into group song numbers was good and again stylish, with both vocal projection and with the lovely groupings, and the original backings excellently conceived. I liked the brisk walking movement and angular passage to get to the various destinations.

I appreciated the care taken with reproducing the clipped speech styles of the era and of the stiff upper lip and contained speech of the Middle Class characters and in contrast the dialects and relaxed communication of the Working Class. The contrast of bawdy musical hall humour and antics of the amoral Working Class characters compared with the intensity and strict morals of the love story between Laura, Alec and Fred. This was brought home very strongly with the switching of comedy play and realism.

At times I felt the cueing was slow and the overall pace of the production flagged and appeared to be ‘padded’ out with pause and slow action with both the comedic input and the angst realism – I wanted to be swept more swiftly along from scene to scene. However, I felt this production did successfully followed the intention of Emma Rice’s Kneehigh production.

ACTING

CHARACTERISATION

LAURA JESSON – From the onset a lovely sense of period and style, both with speech and movement and with fine vocal projection. I could really sense her growing attraction for Alec and her blossoming love for him and her increasing boredom with Fred. An excellent realistic performance.

ALEC HARVEY – He looked perfect and with both movement and clipped style of speech again reflective of the period. At times it was difficult to hear what he was expressing both through lack of vocal projection and a rather fast delivery. To me he lacked tonal motivation when telling Laura he loved her and I lost belief in what he was expressing. I realise it is Middle Class ‘tight lipped’ ‘30’s/40’s but there should still be belief and relating with both motivated speech and body language. A fine, passionate kiss between him and Laura in the ‘flat’ scene and his singing of ‘Room with a View’ was excellent and in fine period style.

FRED JESSON/STEPHEN LYNN – He was the perfect boring and complacent husband and the piece when he was doing the crossword and not listening to Laura as she was confessing, was excellently played. Fine singing input with both Solo and Trio. Speech style and body language perfectly in period. As STEPHEN he was excellently affected, prissy, and laconic. Two lovely characterisations.

MYRTLE BAGOT – A beautifully energised performance throughout and fine movement skills. I felt there could have been more contrast between her ‘refined’ speech and her everyday speech particularly when relating to Beryl. Fine flirty play with Albert and I appreciated her cheeky relating with the audience with familiarity, and a super sexy tango. There was a fine sense of comedy play and relating with all on stage. An uplifting performance at all times.

BERYL WATERS – I appreciated her reluctant waitressing and sloppy attitude. Good relating with the soldiers and she was nicely coy with Stanley, and then a well played flirty piece with him in Act 2. Good Solo singing input. Another fine comedy performance.

ALBERT GODBY – A good North Country accent and throughout an excellent and comfortable relating with Myrtle. As mentioned above, an excellent Tango input. The relentless affair pursuing Myrtle was with excellent comedy timing and expression, making this another fine characterisation.

STANLEY – His gauche and tireless attention to Beryl was well played and his grasping of opportunities to see her with his requests to re-fill his tray, were again well projected. Nice piece flirting with her. A well observed performance.

JOHNNIE – There was a good relating and banter with Bill and the singing input was excellent and very moving. A valuable input into the ensemble.

BOBBY/BILL – As Bobby the ‘correct’ speech style and being a brave boy was well captured. As Bill, a fine relating with Johnnie.

HERMIONE/DOLLY – Fine input in good period style with speech styles and both excellent ‘surface’ Middle Class characters projected with good comedy timing.

MARGARET/MARY – Another good character actor and I think she played the super waitress who slapped the soup down in the restaurant as well as the gushy ‘friend’ attracted to Alec in the Hotel. Excellent comedy play in fine style. As Mary, again fine ‘correct’ speech of the well bought up ‘30’s Middleclass child.

TEAMWORK

Outstanding teamwork and all with great security and especially the rehearsal given to singing harmonies from an ‘acting’ Company, and the Company gave a fine focus on the action at all times. I was impressed with the complete safety and ease with the stylised groupings.

OVERALL ACHIEVEMENT

As stated above this production was faithful to the Kneehigh tradition and you either like the quirky mixture or you do not – I do not find it compelling, but that does not stop me from appreciating the dramatic input given by a Company. The problem with this play is that you are restricted by the Kneehigh concept and have to follow it with an almost faithful replica which limits any production originality. As mentioned under Acting, I could not easily relate to the love story of Laura and Alec – Laura yes, but I was not convinced with the truth of Alec’s motivation. I was however amused by the comedy input of the Station Staff and the bitchy ‘friends’ of Laura. This brings me to another point, in that I was made fully aware of the ‘30/40’s dramatic attitude to the Working Class, which was always to almost caricature them in contrast to the more ‘high minded’ Middle Class to highlight this social division – was this a Kneehigh intention? Overall Achievement? A very good reproduction of an original with a fine input from a talented Company – but what else could be done with the material?

Thank you for your kind hospitality and as always, I look forward to being invited to another production from the Kevin Players.