

## **BERKHAMSTED THEATRE COMPANY - "THE ACCUSED"**

**Director: Maggie Harvey**

**Performed at The Court Theatre, Pendley - 1<sup>st</sup> April 2011**

This play is one where the audience have to pay attention the whole time, as they are the jury and have to decide the verdict – which makes it more interesting, and a test for the cast, as they have to immediately switch to whichever ending is required of them.

As always, an excellent set, which allowed the cast to move about it well, was designed by Iain Fowles and Fran Allen – and featured a very imposing Coat of Arms, which made the look of the play more heavyweight and real.

The furniture was exactly right for a courtroom, and added much to the general ambience of the piece.

Costumes were all good – and I liked the way even the witnesses who had given their evidence, but stayed in the public gallery, changed their clothes every time the day changed. Attention to detail in all aspects makes a production that much better.

I was also conscious that the entire cast seemed to be taking in every word that was being said at all times – which again created a feel of actuality.

Malcolm Emms had a nice ring to his voice as Anthony Kersley (prosecuting counsel), and gave us some weighty utterances, which seemed very in keeping with his character. The animosity between him and the Defence counsel was well drawn.

Tony Bradburn was a very fierce and proper Judge – Justice Cartwright, who seemed to favour the defence, as pointed out by the Jury Bailiff, which was very well-played by Roger Hester. He gave us our instructions clearly and his asides were a good contrast to the more solemn words.

Ruth Salsbury and Pauline Aldridge played the Counsels assistants nicely – never intruding but adding some telling remarks, and always making notes etc during evidence – which made the characters more believable.

For me, probably the most rounded character was Steve Davies, as Sir James Barrington, Counsel for the Defence. Steve has this marvellous twinkle in his eyes which belied the fact that he was about to ask a very difficult question of a witness, and he got good contrasting phrasing into his part.

Terry Casserley had a difficult part as Dr Sherwood, the Accused, as he was always on stage – but had very little to do until later in Act 2. However, he managed to keep looking interested but exasperated with the evidence, and I also liked his change of clothes for each day. A very strong character.

Of the witnesses, I thought they all did very well – I liked the slightly devious Albert Webster – played nicely by Paul Passi – he got the essence of the man well – and his reactions in the public gallery were also very good.

Kevyn Connett as Masood Hussein the chemist where the poisons were obtained, delivered his part well, and made it convincing.

Alan Herring as the expert witness, Professor Alistair Forsyth delivered his evidence in an uncompromising manner, and his confusion when a different slant was put on it by Defence, was well done.

Finally Lucy Palmer, as Jennifer Mitchell – the supposed mistress of Dr Sherwood, started off her evidence in a nervous manner, which suited the part well, and gained in confidence, I liked the way she delivered her evidence, which made us, the jury, alternately doubt both her and Dr Sherwood.

The Court Usher, Nick Spurling was suitably deferential to all parties, but we were aware of his presence, sat quietly in front of the witness box, and I liked his resignation when the Professor went ahead with his oath without prompting; whilst Veronica Thompson and Tim Thompson completed the cast as the guards, small but important parts.

I feel I should just mention Roy Mathers as the Jury Foreman – he only had a few words to say, but they were probably the most important of the play!! Guilty or Not Guilty – whichever the audience had decided – Not Guilty on the night I was there – and the subsequent exchange between Jennifer and the Dr was very telling, and showed us how wrong we were, but that the good Dr had just been using Jennifer to dispose of his wife without the blame falling on him. I would have liked to have seen the ending with a Guilty verdict – as that would also have been very

interesting, and would maybe have answered some other questions still outstanding at the end if we'd chosen a Guilty verdict!!

There were good cross examinations from both Prosecution and Defence – and the end of Act 1 was sufficiently thought provoking to leave the audience trying to work out which way they would vote at the end.

The attention to detail as previously mentioned was good – even down to the programme being typed as a brief, and tied with white tape – which I am assured was the right colour for this case, and not the more usual red/pink tape that you see most.

BTC gave us all a good evening's entertainment with some excellent portrayals, the pace and contrasting characters made it very interesting. It was a shame that there were not more people in the audience the night I was there, but although we were small we were very appreciative of a good, well-acted play.

Thanks again for your hospitality – always nice to catch up with colleagues again, and I'm pleased you are settling well into your new venue – which is good for the Society.

***Nova Horley***