

A Bunch of Amateurs  
28th April 2018  
Tiverton Dramatic Society  
The New Hall, Tiverton  
Play  
Director: Vickie Mogford  
As seen by Joyce Pomeroy

It could be said that this was a bunch of amateurs staging A Bunch of Amateurs and what an excellent job they made of it. There were many wonderful moments in Tiverton Dramatic Society's production when the audience just bubbled into laughter. It was pleasing to know that the audiences were a good size for every performance. Although a very experienced actress this was Vickie's first foray into the world of direction and she clearly had taken well to the task. She had assembled a fine cast and a very able production team. The play is beautifully written with the characters being well drawn. It is a story within a story. An amateur drama group on their uppers is about to stage King Lear. To raise their profile they invite a Hollywood actor to take part, who agrees, mistakenly thinking he will be playing Stratford upon Avon, not Stratford St John, the Suffolk village. Rick Barfoot had got the measure of Jefferson Steel. Very full of himself but a somewhat washed-up actor. The American accent was maintained throughout the play and even when playing King Lear he sounded like an American actor playing Shakespeare! Sofi Gale played his estranged daughter, Jessica Steel, and had an excellent understanding of her wayward, egotistical father and also her relationship with him. Louise Chudley was Lauren Bell, the corporate sponsor of King Lear, who when Jefferson suffered from a bad back, reverted to her past profession as a physiotherapist with hilarious results. Clare Moughton was Dorothy Nettle, the director of the play and the organising strength of the group. To her surprise, she wins the affection and respect of Jefferson Steel. A lovely part played with sensitivity. Mary Plunkett, on the other hand, desperately hopes to win the attention of the star. Played by Alison Harris she displayed many emotions from outrageous flirt to woman scorned. Nigel Dewbury is the actor who is resentful of the attention given to the Hollywood star and was played with great style by David Keating. Jamie Barker as Denis, the somewhat rough and ready odd job man, striding to the front of the stage and delivering a fine Shakespearian speech. Also his various suggestions of how to show the gouging of Gloucester's eyes were very funny. Much like many play rehearsals when there are suggestions from the floor on to how to improve the production! In fact, although larger than life the characters and the happenings of this drama group are much like many of our own and this was one of the strengths of this comedy. It was written in a way that we can easily relate to.

The pace was good apart from when the curtains came across at scene changes. This somewhat broke the audience's involvement with the action and made an extra task for the actors getting their attention back. It is less disruptive to dim the stage, if necessary, whilst changes are made to the set. The set was simple but effective. It depicted a barn which is where they rehearsed but also where the performances took place. Minor changes were made to show the bedroom and the dining room in Mary Plunkett's guest house where Jefferson and his daughter were staying.

The lighting was good with the follow spot often employed. Another first for Vickie as she operated that too - follow spots can be tricky to operate - but she did it well. The sound was beautifully clear, the actors had excellent diction meaning every word could be heard. Some of the voices off were a little over-amplified, a minor problem.

It was good to see that when suitcases were carried they looked heavy, and that was because they were! So much more sensible than pretending.

This entertaining play was an excellent choice for this society.