

Noises Off by Michael Frayn seen at The Place, presented by Bedford Dramatic Club. 15th May 2008 (also running 20-24 May)

If there's one play you mustn't miss at The Place it absolutely has to be **Noises Off** by Michael Frayn presented by Bedford Dramatic Club. This "farce about a farce" is well directed, performed and technically managed. Timing is everything in this show and the BDC Players showed really how talented, clever and determined they really are in this production. There is plenty of silky French knickers, boxer shorts and at one point a very brave bare bottom. However, I rather think it was the clever humour of the show that brought in the first night audience flocking in. Getting tickets was like finding gold. (It was also raising money for charity night, where the company kindly donates money from ticket sales.) This first night audience were absolutely delighted and delightful as they joined in appreciatively with all the clever humour especially the slapstick in the second act.

The talented Robin Mowe (director) not only took on the challenge of the play but the problems of finding storage space for the set, which of course he also built. This production couldn't have been produced so well had it not been for the clever casting he employed. All members of the cast are well established and experienced and even when I ascertained there had been some lines dropped in the first half it had been unnoticeable and the play proceeded seamlessly. This was of course a good thing as the play is about a production made up of faulty and needy actors and to portray this takes competence.

The performance by David Midlane of the sensitive and delicately camp lead actor was delightfully funny and intelligently portrayed. By the second act he only had to walk on stage for people to laugh with anticipation about what he may do next. Pat Pendall played the "veteran" actress Dotty Otley and with lines like "can't see far with this leg" had us crying with laughter. She was also very scary welding an axe during the misunderstandings and lover's tiffs during the second act.

The second act is the cleverest and funniest of all second acts the world over and was portrayed flawlessly by the cast. The mix of back stage tiffs, indiscretions, sheer panic and violence was done perfectly; the attitude that the show must go on despite all this plus a threatened walkout is the objective that carries the humour.

There are several rewrites of **Noises Off**, which the playwright in his wisdom took upon himself. This production has taken the final version except for the last five minutes, which reverts back to the original text, which is apparently more appropriate to The Place's studio theatre space. As regards the near proximity of space between audience and stage, it was felt among the audience that this made the production more enjoyable because we were better able to see the action and felt more caught up in the drama. I can certainly vouch for this. Having seen **Noises Off** in the West End a few years ago in a larger theatre, it was of course very funny, but this production in a small space made it more enjoyable. So along with affordable tickets, cheaper wine, fantastic directing and with performances like these, we can safely give the West End a miss.

Claudia Miller

