

The Jollies by Alan Ayckbourn a review of production seen Saturday 15<sup>th</sup> March 2008 at The Place, Bradgate Road, Bedford, Presented by Bedford Dramatic Club (BDC).

This was an intelligent and highly entertaining production of The Jollies, a sadly little known play by Alan Ayckbourn. Fortunately Naomi Mudd, director and the rest of the BDC wisely chose to produce it, which was a fantastic choice for entertaining both adults and children.

The central idea of the play is to show how a family cope when a small boy and his mother are reversed in age due to a mix up at a magic show and how the rather sensible teenage daughter/sister, Polly Jolly holds everything together. The family go through some fantastic adventures, managing to cleverly trick a social worker and a policeman in an attempt to stay together. They end up working at a farm where the boy, Billy, makes friends with Rambo the dog. They eventually work out how to reclaim their original ages again through magic, but Rambo the dog still recognises Billy in child form and so Billy gets to keep the dog and so keep his heart's desire for his birthday.

The character of the mother Jilly Jolly (played by Ruth Houghton as older Jilly and Hattie Idle as younger Jilly) has a brilliant mind for mathematics and entertains the audience with her mathematical skills. Young Hattie Idle did a great job in remembering long and complicated mathematical sequences and impressed me as much as if she had walked a tight rope. Lauren James as Polly held the narrative of the show together seamlessly, but it was really Richard Moon as Billy her brother, a nine year old in an adult body who stole the show through sheer silliness. At one point he was nearly outshone in silliness by Rambo the dog played in a shaggy dog costume by George Willis, but after consulting my seven year old daughter Amy, Billy still came out top for laughs.

Now a word about the director: I first met Naomi in the cast of an old BDC production of David Copperfield seven years ago. She was about seventeen and a competent actress who knew her own mind. While I then went on to help re-populate the Earth, Naomi has gone from strength to strength in the BDC, and on film, appearing alongside Kate Winslet in the film Enigma. I am pleased to say that in this production, her first full-length play, she has also earned her stripes as a competent director too.

I am sorry to report I have nothing bad to say about the production as we both thoroughly enjoyed the show and so much that at times I forgot I was there to review and had to remind myself to take notes. Which leaves me to plug the next BDC show, **Noises Off** by Michael Frayn directed by the talented Robin Mowe. Now this play **is really the funniest play ever written, ever** (in my opinion) and having seen what the BDC can do with comedy in **The Jollies** I can absolutely recommend this production of **Noises Off**, which runs at The Place from May 15-17 and 20-24 tickets available online at [www.theplacebedford.org.uk](http://www.theplacebedford.org.uk) or from Central Box Office on 01234 269519

Claudia Miller

