Supper Theatre ...........An Evening with Noel

How glorious it is to turn up to watch a Mary Dawson production with the West Meon Theatre and know you will be entertained and impressed. There was music and laughter and sexual tension. No violence of course, except the table manners of the distracted guests. No swearing either except I think a rather shocking ‘bloody’ which would have forced ‘oohs’ and ‘aahs’ from the 1936 audience.

The evening started with a dressing gown and a cigarette holder being channeled by Mick Keegan as Noel Coward saying ‘welcome to my evening’. Lovely.

Here I must for a moment take the road less travelled because a friend of mine knocked on the door of Noel Cowards house in Switzerland in the 60s. and he answered the door in the exact same outfit, a dressing gown and a long cigarette holder. They were a group of young ladies at a ‘finishing school’ locally and they were carol singing. ‘What would you like us to sing?’ says they. ‘The First Noel’ says Coward, ‘my favourite.’ Lovely.

There is a character in Much Ado About Nothing called Leonato who is a Lear light, a wonderful character and who is barely noticed because Benedict and Beatrice are wittily engaging in a courtship battle. I mention this because it is normally the case that our lovers Alec and Laura dominate proceedings. Whilst the story of their bitter sweet romance engages our hearts it was not the case with this production, it was wonderfully balanced by the lustier and more overt relationships of Myrtle and Albert played by Rachel Wells and Peter Garner and Darren Butler and Felicity Harris as the third couple. Indeed the colour and life by and behind the counter in the station cafe balances beautifully and relieves the tension that our more middle class lovers are bringing to their affair in 1936. Katie Jacobs as Laura was quite lovely, graceful and subtle as the conflicted one in the relationship with Alec played by Stuart Forsyth … it is a tribute to the honesty of their playing that no-one shouted ‘get a room,’ but saw the relevance and difficulty of their story across the decades. Did they know each other ‘biblically’ during November in the flat of Alec’s friend. I don’t know, i’ve always thought not. More bitter sweet.

The talkative and intrusive friend who limited the farewell of Alec and Laura to an agonised hand shake was played pitch perfectly by Helena Gomm.

I heard a jewish patriarch say to his family as they sat down for Passover: ‘Passover for dummies: They tried to kill us , they failed, let’s eat.’

Still Life for dummies: ‘ We wanted to shag, they did, we didn’t, I’m off.’

Or in Noel Cowards words: ‘Forgive me? For everything. For meeting you, in the first place. For taking the piece of grit out of your eye. For loving you. For bringing you so much misery.’

Nicholas Jones