

## NEVER IN 'A MONTH OF SUNDAYS' WILL THIS FLOP

Stage Two Downham's latest production should strike a chord with everyone, says producer Barbara Taylor.

It is 'Month of Sundays', a gentle comedy from Bob Larbey, who until now has been very successful at writing for TV - notably 'The Good Life', 'A Fine Romance' and 'Ever-decreasing Circles'.

It features life in a rest home for the elderly, in particular through the relationships of one resident (played by Mel Scolah), but has a nice, gentle humour and situations to which we can all relate

Mrs Taylor picked the play because she liked it a lot, but also because she was asked to produce at short notice and Bob Larbey's play has a cast of six, on one set, with simple staging.

'I will be sell-out as usual, I expect', she added - so book early. The play will be performed at the village hall from March 13<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup>

Our picture, taken during rehearsals, shows, from the left: Dorothy Cushing, Mel Scolah (seated), David King, Lesley Knight, Pat Hargreaves (standing) and Gerald Hood

## STAGE TWO IN ACTION

'A Month of Sundays', Stage Two's latest production, which is being performed in Downham Village Hall between March 13<sup>th</sup> 16<sup>th</sup>.

This is a new modern play directed by Barbara Taylor, centred around life in an old people's rest home, and the relationships that develop, provides great entertainment with gentle humour, while at the same time arousing sympathy.

Left to right: Mel Scolah, Lesley Knight, Gerald Hood, Pat Hargreaves and Dorothy Cushing.

## ADMIRABLE CHOICE OF PRODUCTION FOR STAGE TWO

Playgoers who went to see 'A Month of Sundays' by Bob LArbey, directed by Barbara Taylor at Downham, enjoyed a wonderful treat. There was magic in the air.

Stage Two's springtime production proved to be an admirable choice of play for all the right reasons.

Its theme was different - an interesting change for director, players and audience alike.

In a most gentle and humorous way, it took a straight look at the process of growing old - a phenomenon from which none of us can escape - and therein lies its strong, dramatic clout.

The audience sat spell-bound as they shared in that human condition. Their emotions of love, sympathy, understanding and sadness were moved by this performance.

The action of 'A Month of Sundays' took place in Cooper's bed-sitting room in a rest home for the elderly. It covered the span of one month of his life.

This play proved a splendid vehicle for the Stage Two drama society. It provided the opportunity for some of its older, more experienced members to fulfil their acting skills. There were some lovely cameo roles which served to highlight the endearingly stoic characteristics of Cooper which the various relationships he enjoyed with nursing staff, family and his friend Aylott.

Playing the role of Cooper gave Mel Scolah a wonderful chance to shine. It must be very satisfying for a company to present a production which allows one of its members to excel in a major part and Mel obviously relished the effort required by his lengthy and beautifully performed roles.

A mood of warm, mellow nostalgia was set by some familiar music before the curtain opened on a set which was neat and effective and drew applause from the audience.

Mel Scolah's characterisation of Cooper was delightful. Although his physical movement was severely restricted and it took great willpower to get dressed, Cooper's lively mind kept the audience eagerly awaiting his next witticism and Mel dealt out this sparkling repartee with a real twinkle in his eyes.

When his friend and fellow resident Aylott, serenely played by Gerald Hood, came to visit him, the two old boys, over glasses of whisky, devised exciting plots to 'escape'.

Their escape was not so much from the rest home as from the inevitability of deteriorating into 'zombies' like their unseen pal George, who had just been found paddling in the pond.

Bob Larbey's superb dialogue is most sensitively written. Typically masculine humour kept the audience gurgling all the time, for as Aylott's memory faded and Cooper's bladder took on a life of its own, Cooper delighted and imagination with his extraordinarily funny flights of fancy, picturing himself floating through the air encased in trousers made of inflatable plastic wine bags! - rather reminiscent of Monty Python's Flying Circus.

At the close of the second act, Aylott's mind had begun to blur and the audience was wrapt as Gerald led us into the twilight of his 'cotton-wool' sensations, Most moving!

Cooper's nurse Wilson was played by Lesley Knight and how she enjoyed this part. The rapport of these actors was glowing. There was warm loving badinage here as she invited him to her wedding - and let him share in part of her life - much more so than his own daughter.

Wilson's anguish at the treatment of one of the residents by his family was so sensitively played that Lesley's emotion embodied human compassion.

Mrs Baker, the cleaning lady, fairly stole the heart. She wouldn't allow the other cleaner into Cooper's room! What a lovely cameo part Pat Hargreaves played. Her phrasing in that flat, fruity voice was most enjoyable to hear.

On the first Sunday of each month the quiet monotony of Cooper's life was interrupted by Julia and Peter, his daughter and her husband, who arrived to pay their duty visit.

Dorothy Cushing and David King play Julia and Peter with hesitancy and restraint, in direct contrast to the flow of affection so evident from Cooper's rest home friends - their acting presence really changed the atmosphere.

'A Month of Sundays' ended on a strong note of hope, despite the relentless passage of time for Cooper and Aylott.

This play has a built-in magic that carries its players along with it - but the director is the bridge between the intention of the playwright and the interpretation by the cast and it is a pleasure to congratulate Barbara on the integrity of her memorable production. Appreciation also must go to the back-stage team.

Stage Two must feel very happy with its presentation of 'A Month of Sundays'.