

Well done team for tackling such a difficult play!

STAGE Two Downham's most recent presentation, "Woman in Mind," is one of Alan Ayckbourn's newest plays, written during his "blacker period."

It is a play of imagination, emotion, poignancy and pathos and, unlike his earlier works, more devoid of humour.

Without the explanation in the programme, it might have been difficult to realise that the action, on the one hand, is in the real life of the main character and, on the other, is in her imagination, although the changes had been suggested by the use of varied lighting.

Ayckbourn is not always the simplest of playwrights to interpret and this piece is probably one of his most difficult. He is a student of human behaviour and this is probably one of his most disturbing observations.

The action centres round the gradual mental decline of one woman, starved of affection and companionship by her real family, who conjures up in her mind an ideal husband and family who appear to her from time to time in her beautiful imaginary garden.

It is an ambitious play to tackle and especially on a village hall stage, but certainly on the night I was there, a very interesting evening and one which held the audience's attention throughout.

The set was most attractive. The small stage was used to good effect, with a variety of levels and sufficient scenery and decor spread over the proscenium to suggest the maximum width.

The production was carefully handled by director Mel Scorah and the staging and action were well balanced.

There are eight characters in the play, each absolutely defined. In this presentation, the director and the actors had obviously explored the characters and the result was extremely pleasing and successful.

Mel himself took the role of the real-life husband and was smug, stuffy and boring, to say the least. No one would have

wanted to share his roof! Brian Haworth was everything an ideal, loving husband should be (almost too good to be true!)

The imaginary daughter was delightfully portrayed by Sarah Uttley with natural charm, light, easy movements and a glistening expression. I liked the use of white clothing for these characters, which suggested their ethereal quality.

One of the outstanding performances of this production came from Fran Osborne as Muriel, the very dull, pitiful "in-law." She gave a beautiful characterisation sustained throughout, which could very easily have gone over the top, but never did.

Bob Cleeve succeeded in the role of the family friend, an ordinary character, but well delivered and warmly presented.

The main character, who is on stage throughout the play, is Susan, the slowly deteriorating mid-

dle-aged psychopath. Not only is this a huge part to cope with, but it calls for all manner of emotions and is a very demanding role indeed.

It was exceedingly well performed by Dorothy Cushing who portrayed all the facets of the character, bringing out the humour as well as the pathos and dejection.

It was nice to see pleasant and attractive young men on stage in the shape of Richard Bennett and David Leadbeater, both of whom established their characters. I would have liked just a little more forcefulness in their performances.

The newly-installed, improved sound system added to the atmosphere of the play, which proved to be an excellent evening's entertainment.

Very well done, Mel Scorah and all your team.

BARBARA TAYLOR

Coming to the rescue to help funny and challenging play

A CLITHEROE sixth-former and local nursery have come to the rescue of an amateur drama group trying to get its production off the ground.

Stage Two Downham has David Leadbeater (17) and Barkers Primrose Nurseries to thank for its forthcoming production of the Alan Ayckbourn comedy "Woman in Mind."

David, who attends Clitheroe Royal Grammar School, saved the day when Clitheroe's David Watson (21) abandoned his part as "Rick the Imaginary Son" to become a colonial marine at the new "Alien War" attraction in London's Trucadero.

Barkers, on the other hand, has supplied a cornucopia of potted plants

and shrubs for the set of the production, which is supposed to take place in the garden of the main character, Susan Gannet.

Played by Dorothy Cushing, Susan is going through a mid-life crisis where her imagination becomes more exciting than reality. Not only does she conjure up an imaginary family, but also has both a real and imaginary garden.

The results are a disturbingly funny play which presents a challenge to both actors and stage manager David King.

Produced by Mel Scolah, the play is being presented in Downham Village Hall at 7:30 p.m. next Wednesday to Saturday. Admission is £2.50. Tickets are available from the Tourist Information Centre, Hammond's Bakery in St Mary's Street, Downham Post Office or Mrs Janet Hulme (Clitheroe 24157).

Extravagant humour to sit back and enjoy

Ad in Times 7/4/94

FOR its spring production, Stage Two Downham chose to present "Move Over, Mrs Markham," by Ray Cooney and John Chapman, who have been churning out plays of this type for many years.

This one is now quite old, having been first performed in 1969, but still plays well and, on the whole, audiences love it.

Billed as a comedy, it would be more correct to call it farce, however, because of its extravagant humour and ridiculous situations.

Farce, being the most difficult medium to portray on stage, can fail miserably if not played at a cracking pace with fine pointing of witty dialogue. There was no problem on this occasion. The pace was fast and furious, with the funny lines crisply delivered, and the audience lapped it up.

I defy anyone to unravel the plot! Having seen the play many times, I have tried, but after about half-an-hour of total improbability it is usually simpler to give up, sit back and enjoy it if you can — and I certainly could and did with this production.

As usual in farce, there are numerous doors with characters popping in and out of the wrong ones, which is no easy feat on a stage as small as that in Downham's village hall. However, the limitations were overcome by the use of alcoves, closets with self-sliders, the minimum of doors and a raised acting level.

The composite set was extremely attractive. In fact, the whole effect was very pleasing on the eye, as were the actors, who were beautifully dressed (or undressed!) at all times, for the play is full of sexual connotations and innuendo, but is really a harmless romp.

It was a team effort, very well cast, with no serious weaknesses. As such, it would be difficult to single out any performance.

The main characters of Mr and Mrs Markham were played by Bob Cleeve and Lesley Knight, the latter being on stage almost throughout the play, and the erring couple of Mr and Mrs Hodge by David King and Judy Pengelly. The plum part of the interior designer with effeminate tendencies was well handled by Brian Haworth, without going "over the top."

In addition, four delightful cameo parts were played by Barbara Price as the "Doggie" lady, Stella Barnes as yet another stripper, Rachel Scholes as a gorgeous maid and Mel Scora as the hopeful lover. The play was directed by Dorothy Cushing.

It was a good night's entertainment. Both the actors and the audience enjoyed themselves. What more can one ask!

BARBARA TAYLOR