

MAKING A NOISE WITH NOTHING ON

Under the meticulous direction of Fran Osborne, Stage Two, Downham, triumphed again with this year's autumn farce entitled 'Noises Off', by Michael Frayn.

'Noises Off' centres round a play within a play and pokes good natured fun at the droll happenings that could take place among a company of actors who all have their foibles. It contains a complicated plot, the action of which runs simultaneously on two levels and features action in a theatrical touring company which tours between fringe theatres in various towns.

'Nothing On' was the title of the play that the touring company was staging and in act on of 'Noises Off. We first met the company in the Grand Theatre, Weston-super-Mare, chaotically attempting to run through their dress rehearsal.

We sympathised with the despairing producer Lloyd Dallas, played stoically by Stéve Cooke, who is helpless as his actors keep interrupting the rehearsal to chat about their own personal problems. Naturally confusion ensued, hence the farce.

The set design was a mammoth task for Dan Bradbury, who is well-noted for his expert scenic planning on Downham's small stage. The set required six working doors on three levels, and the construction needed to be firm to withstand nine actors rushing in and out, slamming doors and using stairs.

The scenery in acts one and three depicted the entrance hall of a house. For act two the whole set had to be turned round to represent backstage of that same scenery.

The change needed major crew effort and top marks go to Ian Rimmer and his backstage staff for this.

Within a play every actor has to use skill to embody the character of the person he has to portray, but in 'Noises Off' the Stage Two actors had to play two different roles at the same.

They played touring company actors rehearsing and performing their parts in their current tour of 'Nothing On'.

Geraldine Metcalf played the role of tourist company actress Dotty, who was acting the part of Mrs Clackett, the house-keeper in 'Nothing On'.

She had the audience laughing as soon as the curtain rose and she skilfully sustained her scatter-brained role throughout. She was the one with the plates of sardines which featured so often throughout the play.

Playing along with Geraldine and Steve Cooke were Gerry Purchase, who was company actor Garry.

He acted the part of Roger in 'Nothing On'. Suesi Windle was the female lead named Brooke, who took the part of glamorous Vicki. Posh Poppy Taylor, the naive, inexperienced ASM was sensitively played by Rachel Humphreys.

Bob Cleeve was company actor Frederick, who was cast as wimpish Phillip. Glen Purchase played Belinda/Flavia. Karl Barnsley was the company's harassed young SM and David Clews characterised the deaf old, hard-drinking Shakespearian actor Selsdon, who acted as a burglar.

Everyone depicted their characterisations very clearly, which enriched all the farcical situations.

The hilarious sub plots provided constant laughter. Humorous use of props and sound added to the face.

The women's costumes added visual pleasure and as Vicki, Suesi Windle stole the show looking fantastic in her sexy black basque with black tights encasing her lovely long legs.

Belinda, the one who always tried to calm her temperamental colleagues, wore eye-catching yellow and black while Poppy's modern togs really enhanced her character.

Mrs Clackett slopped about in sheepskin slippers, her head scarf and nylon overall capturing her role admirably. Three burglar look-alikes made for further comedy.

The players excelled themselves within the physical demands of this production and as several of the cast made their debut they performed a work that required quick vocal and physical cues which must have taken huge personal effort to memorise.

The audience applauded with gusto as the cast took their bow and delighted comments flowed as they happily left Downham Hall aching with laughter.

Margaret Smith