

YOUR WEEKLY LIFESTYLE AND ENTERTAINMENT GUIDE

THE VALENTY WOW In association with... 24/7

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Arsenic and Old Lace was a real treat

If you missed Stage Two's Downham production of *Arsenic and Old Lace*, you missed a real treat.

Under Kim Crowdon's tight direction, the cast and stage crew presented a super-entertainment for a dark winter's night.

The curtain rose into the living room of two elderly sisters, Abby and Martha Brewster, taking tea with reverend Dr Harper (Robin Knipe) and their batty nephew Teddy. Although the time was set in 1942 their period house seemed dated and untouched. However, they were heavily involved with their vicar who lived next door near the cemetery.

Abby and Martha were played with fine conviction by Glen Purchase and Helen Coles. Their dual characterisations dovetailed admirably, made evident by their eye contact and subtle private gestures. The inseparable sisters had genuine but naive beliefs as they valued their "good intentions". Their acting skills fully portrayed the

playwright's dark humour. Delightfully tongue in cheek.

Batty Teddy Brewster thought that he was President Roosevelt and that he alone was responsible for digging the locks in the Panama Canal – situated no less than in the sisters' cellar. Stage designer had cunningly placed it down a frontal trapdoor in the audience floor. All spookily lit for dramatic effect.

Steve Cooke really created his role of Teddy Brewster using facial expressions and the daftness of his delusion with evident enjoyment. Through-out the play's progress, Teddy's blasts on his bugle brought several underhand plots of other family members to abrupt stops. What fun!

Dr Harper's beautiful daughter Elaine, played with conviction by newcomer Erica Mileham, was in love with Mortimer Brewster, a young critic of New York. Whenever the lovers met their trysts fell to bits because of Mortimer's distractions. His aunts soon told him their ideas that they

kindly put lonely old men out of their misery by 'caring for them' with a glass of home made "elderberry wine" laced with arsenic placed on their lace covered table.

A vulnerable, down-at-heel old gent Mr Gibbs, just called looking for a room. The sisters promptly eyed him up before he was quickly rescued by Mortimer. Tom Garner ideally personified that lucky old fellow.

Chris Bowers, acting as Mortimer, portrayed a gamut of emotions of shock, disbelief and panic with great gusto. After many horrifying discoveries Mortimer desperately attempted to avert any guilt away from his aunts and towards the uncomprehending Teddy, but...

Another long-lost brother Jonathan appeared to visit his aunts; aiming to continue his criminal activities in the family home. He'd brought his equally shady partner,

Dr Einstein, a former plastic surgeon who had earlier performed surgery on Jonathan, refacing him as a Boris



The cast of *Arsenic and Old Lace*

Karloff look alike. Jonathan, played by Bob Cleave, delighted the audience as he stalked around the furniture. Viewers appreciated his bizarre make-up. Einstein's manner appeared very edgy due to the reputation of his ghoulish practices. Kenny Entwistle as the Doc played a twitchy foil against Jonathan's explosive violence. This duo also had a corpse in their car and they aimed to dump it in auntie's window seat. Both of these crooks liked their drink and hovered around the wine glass. Who'd be first?

Punctuated by exciting Black Outs, overnight, Teddy stealthily carried the first body from the window seat and disappeared to the Panama Canal with it. The corpse from the car was swiftly

stashed into the empty seat by Doc Einstein. Mortimer's next shock?

Not unexpectedly the house in Brooklyn was called upon by police on duty. First, Officer O'Hara, admirably played by Tim Martin, who surprised Mortimer by confessing his wish to write plays.

More implausible revelations followed as the sisters also confessed to having thirteen bodies buried in their cellar. Cop Number Two appeared played by none other than director Kim.

Enter florid Irishman Lieutenant Rooney gustily played by Brian Haworth. Looking for his missing officers and he promptly arrested. Even though their weird secrets were revealed to everyone by

the two old ladies, the only disbeliever was Lieutenant Rooney who steadily felt that they could not possibly be so wicked. Eventually the insane sisters agreed to accompany nephew Teddy to live with him in a Sanatorium. Then shortly afterwards Gerry Purchase's meek-looking Superintendent arrived to collect them ... and straightway they think he's just the right type to enjoy some elderberry wine.

The Stage Two cast and backstage team held close to the theme of *Magic of Disbelief* throughout this macabre and funny play. Viewers were engaged in waves of laughter.

We look forward to your next production.

MSS

