

The Admirable Crichton – Stage Two Downham – 30th November 2018

The Admirable Crichton was written by J.M. Barrie (pre-Peter Pan) in 1902 and apparently caused a huge upset amongst audiences at the time by essentially making a secure pre-war audience question the social order of the time, namely that that position is based on birth alone and brains or simple ability play no part in it. As Sir Arthur Conan-Doyle said "if a king and an able seaman were to be wrecked together on a desert island, the sailor would end as king and the monarch as servant"

Lord Loam agrees with social equality, at least he does once a month, when he invites all his servants to take tea with the family – an occasion hated by upstairs and downstairs alike, except the Earl, but most especially by Crichton, the Butler. He does however allow that under different circumstances different criteria may apply and of course, the laws of the theatre make this possible by, somewhat improbably, shipwrecking the earl and his three daughters, a very lowly maid, a male cousin of the family, a parson and, of course, The Admirable Crichton on a desert island for two years!

Considering the practical difficulties of set changes drawing room to island at the end of scene 1, then the reversé at the end of scene 3 the opening scene looked good and created an immediate time-shift for the audience to 1902. I thought the settee looked a little cramped to say the least but entirely understood the reasons for that at the end of the scene. The crew did an absolutely magnificent job with the scene changes – the speed, silence and general efficiency with which they were accomplished was frankly amazing. Just as a point of reference when the play first opened in 1902 the curtain did not come in until well past midnight due to the complexities of the changes. Many, many congratulations to the crew for a simply cracking job.

Costumes across the board looked very good – the dresses for the ladies in the opening and closing scenes were particularly impressive, and I loved the 'tablecloth'? worn as a dress on the island, and the vicar with his dog collar on his head and his bib protecting his neck from the sun was a wonderful moment of visual humour. Congratulations on the attention to detail for all the costumes.

The same attention to detail was also visible in the props, and the newspapers looked simply wonderful, as did all the props. What a supremely dedicated team of 'crew' (in its most inclusive meaning) you are fortunate to have.

Regular readers of my reviews will know that I never name people – although it must be said that the temptation here is almost irresistible, but as every person on the stage was an example of how, in my eyes anyway, 'it should be done' it seems unfair to single out one person. This was very clearly a team effort and I include in that the 'extras' who made very a brief, non-speaking appearance in the tea-party scene. Without exception, the whole cast watched, listened and reacted to unfolding events through some excellent facial expressions. Diction and intonation (so important in period plays) was good, we heard every word – thank you.

The directors did a great job in casting the play and obviously had a clear vision of the piece 'as a whole'. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine how the play could have been cast any better, all the cast looked comfortable on stage, and just as importantly with each other, and I loved the opening entrance via the auditorium.

In conclusion a highly enjoyable evening for which I thank Stage Two Downham – playing to an almost full house (only 4 seats available – congratulations), and it was most certainly worth the trip out on a cold, wet, windy and VERY dark evening for all of your audience. This was my first visit to Downham and, based on this, I sincerely hope that it will not be my last. Many, many congratulations on a great show and well done to ALL concerned. Thank you for making me feel so very welcome.

Christine Hunter Hughes – 30.11.18