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A Bunch of Amateurs: Stage Two Downham Nov 2019

A Bunch of Amateurs played by a bunch of amateurs? Not exactly because Stage Two at Downham present a very professional and entertaining version of Ian Hislop and Nick Newman's comedy with a Shakespearean twist. The gist of the plot is that a fading Hollywood action hero comes to England to boost his flagging career to play King Lear at Stratford. However, he discovers that it is Stratford in Suffolk where a group of villagers are desperate to save their little theatre and inevitably problems and personality clashes ensue. The desperate Hollywood 'thesp', Jefferson Steele is played by Richard Hubbard who gives a wonderful bravura performance. He encounters the steely determination of Dorothy Nettle, the director of the company, a great portrayal by Annie Wildman. Both Jefferson and Dorothy have to overcome the machinations of the self important Nigel Dewsbury who is convinced he is the right man to play Lear. Bob Cleeve gives a suitably boastful but sneaky interpretation. Everything is hindered by Mary Plunkett, local landlady and actress, a very funny performance from Wendy Watson, Denis Dobbins (Alan Heron) an equally comic handyman and the arrival of Lauren Bell (Kella Bowers) wife of the sponsor and surprisingly Jessica Steele (Jen Whiteside) Jefferson's estranged daughter. Kim Croydon, Jacqui Shepherd and Kate Herron are the press team following the events. The Fool, a significant player in Shakespeare's *King Lear* appears in full motley costume, played by Fletcher Illingworth, to sing little ditties from the tragedy to comment on the action. The small but accomplished cast are all impressive. It does help if you are familiar with *King Lear*. I studied it for A level more years ago than I care to count. My daughter, who accompanied me, and I were particularly amused by the final act which gives a cleverly truncated version of the very long play with a dramatic climax. She is not a great fan of the Bard as I am! She thoroughly enjoyed the production of *A Bunch of Amateurs*. The production was deservedly sold out. Indeed I met a friend the following evening who was very disappointed when there were no tickets left, a sign of the well deserved popularity of this great local group. I look forward to their next production.

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