

LIVELY RECEPTION FOR THIS WEDDING AT WADDINGTON

Domestic squabbles brought to the surface by the preparations for a wedding, and the unexpected visit of a very strange outsider provide the main theme of Ronald Millar's farcical comedy 'The bride and the bachelor', presented by the Waddington Drama Group.

I tremble to think what a less talented cast would have made of the play, for split-second timing was essential, and acting ability of a high order to transform an improbable piece of nonsense into some semblance of credibility. But the Waddington group rose to the occasion. The first-night audience was quick to react to some extremely witty lines, and it must be admitted a long series of macabre jokes, which the sensitive would find of doubtful taste.

The comings and goings, the misunderstandings, and the contrived situations became hilarious as the play progressed, and the author sharpened his wits at the expense of the Arts Council, the Civil Service and sundry other targets.

The story concerns the adopted daughter of Isabel and Jason Kilpatrick, who gets the jitters on the eve of her wedding, and who suffers from strange dreams. An unexpected visitor arrives to inform the household that though he had died a few days earlier, he was obliged to return because he had died a bachelor.

Apparently he had either to repair the omission, or renounce his previous intolerant views on marriage. Of course, there is much more than that to the play, much of it padding, and with many twists and turns, and with the final denouement somewhat surprising.

Pat Hargreaves gave brilliant performance as Isabel, speaking with clarity, and variations of tone and style to meet the changing needs of the play, ranging from downright comedy to pure fantasy. She was adept with the 'throw away line' and her timing was impeccable. She had a first class partner in Derek Green as her husband, who provided a perfect foil for her wit, playing with the right amount of dotty innocence.

Brian Keating in the part of visitor Sir William had a difficult part and although he was a very substantial we-dressing spectre, he managed to convey his 'other worldliness'.

Susan Oliver in the role of the teenage daughter had all the necessary zip and energy, and Judith Smith was a very appealing bride. Audrey Cooke did well as a slightly incoherent Welsh maid, and Chris Wood was equally competent as the bridegroom. Kathy Bird made only a brief appearance at the beginning and end of the play, both with equal effect.

Barbara Scattergood's production showed flair and understanding.

Although this was my first visit to Waddington, I was most impressed by their ability. But I would like to see them in a play with a little more 'meat' in it, for if they can put life (no pun intended) into an improbable play like 'The bride and the bachelor', then I would like to see them fully extended. But it is only fair to say that the audience loved it, and showed this in no uncertain fashion by their laughter and applause.

Norman Powell