

THE METHWOLD THEATRE CLUB
Blithe Spirit

DIRECTOR
Sheila Welland

VENUE
St Georges Hall Complex, Methwold

DATE
Thursday November 16th 2017

There are many great joys associated with being a NODA Regional Representative. Seeing good shows, seeing shows that are better than a Society has done before and meeting some truly lovely people. I am delighted to say that Am dram people really don't come much nicer than those you would find down Methwold way. A newish Society, most noted for offering original drama, but this time, calling upon the services of Mr Coward and his evergreen classic 'Blithe Spirit'. Ticket sales had been good and the newly acquired and recently improved venue at the St Georges Complex was pleasingly full as I took my seat and prepared for a trip down a well-trodden path.

My last 'Blithe Spirit' (and yes there have been a few over the years) was quite recent and they did it completely un-cut! ... two intervals and all! I was just a little relieved that the mighty quill-master, Burtie Welland had been a little less inhibited. The story surely needs no re-telling - but just in case To help him with his latest novel, writer Charles Condomine, calls upon local psychic, Madame Arcati, to perform a seance at his house for his friends, Dr and Mrs Bradshaw and his second wife Ruth. Although a sceptic, Charles is quickly converted as the spirit of his first wife Elvira is summoned and takes up lodgings in his house. There is much malarkey and a lot of words spoken as all those involved work to remove the spirit. It is easy to forget how many words there really are when they are all so beautifully written.

This new venue is perfect for plays. The whole room has a warm feeling and the size and proportions of the stage are ideal for this (or any other) title. The set (uncredited) was superb. The very embodiment of a town house drawing room of that period. The attention to detail was extremely impressive, with incidental properties (Claire Tough and Jose O'Ware) adding greatly to the spectacle. Sound and lighting (Terry Shapland) were bang on the money with the playing of the record, *always* (pun intended) on cue. Costumes (uncredited) were also fine and dandy with complimentary hair and make-up causing me no offence whatsoever.

In the supporting roles, I enjoyed Bob Hammond as charming local Doctor, Bradman with Teresa Thomas tuning in another good performance as his wife. Anna Ephithite was perfect as double-time housemaid, Edith, making the most of the many comic opportunities.

In the more prominent roles, Sarah Appleton turned in a good shift as the high spirited and impudent younger first wife, Elvira and director, Sheila Welland was on top form as eccentric psychic, Madame Arcati. The one thing I always leave a 'Blithe Spirit' with is ... a deep sense of sympathy for whoever is playing Charles Condomine. They come on stage and scarcely leave it for two hours. What is more, during that time they never stop

talking. As the central character, Burtie Welland did a fine job with just a little of the first night perceptible. Tina Camfield was on hand with just a few prompts to help him along. A good characterisation from a fine actor.

Penultimate paragraph honours must go (on this occasion) in the direction of the brilliant Rosemary Gibson. In a production that could have done with a couple more rehearsals she not only delivered a superb characterisation as much put-upon second wife, Ruth but also worked hard to keep things going during some of the sticky moments. Mrs Gibson is a major talent, and this was perfect casting for her.

Having touched on the best things about being a NODA rep ... I now come to the worst thing - and that is talking to Directors and cast who have an elevated impression of their offering. No such problems here! A great conversation with all concerned helped be understand the trials and tribulations of putting on any production. I said then, and will say again now, don't be too hard on yourselves. This play is so well-known it is very easy to under-estimate how difficult it is to perform, and this was a good effort by any standards. My compliments to Director, Sheila Welland, for rounding them up and heading them home. Mr Welland suggested to me that in future he may focus on his own penmanship (which is of an excellent quality) to allow for the creation of roles for those regular performers in the Society. Well done Methwold Theatre Club your welcome is as warm as anywhere I go and I love watching your Society develop and grow. Until next time.

Stephen P. E. Hayter.

(Regional Representative – NODA Eastern Region – Area 4 North)