

THE METHWOLD THEATRE CLUB
Brothers and Sisters

DIRECTOR
Sheila Welland

VENUE
St Georges Hall Complex, Methwold

DATE
Friday March 3rd 2017

Can it really be three and a half months since I made my first visit to (relatively) newly formed Methwold Theatre Club for an excellent Victorian Music Hall? Dressed in frock-coat and top hat, I had a fantastic evening in the company of some truly lovely people. Well, I was even more excited for my second visit, as MTC were doing a Bertie Welland original piece (or was it pieces) called Brothers and Sisters. Two one-act plays that, whilst self-contained, shared context and characters across both acts. The Methwold massive had moved into its new (and permanent) home on the remarkable St Georges Complex and, whilst the audience were few, I was truly ready for some original theatre.

The aforementioned new location had already received quite a significant amount of hasty (two weeks only) customisation to facilitate this production and it is a great venue with enormous potential. Both cast and crew were shared across the two pieces and the set (uncredited, but I suspect a team effort) whilst basic, was perfectly suitable for this type of "Studio" style performance. Lighting (Terry Shapland) again did no more or less than it needed to and it was made known to me that the lighting options were limited for the time being by access to the roof and the strength of the superstructure. The costumes were suitably contemporary and incidental props caused me no offence whatsoever.

The stories entitled 'Brothers in Arms' and 'Me and My Sister' were both penned by MTC's Major Domo, Burtie Welland, and they were both set on the same cruise liner during what seemed to be a singles-only cruise. Some of the characters straddled both productions and there was much synergy in the two set ups. 'Brothers in Arms' introduced us to two single (Geordie) brothers whilst 'Me and My Sister' offered us two single sisters both with very different characters. In consideration of the writing, I have to say both pieces were well conceived and the second of the two particularly, very well structured.

In the supporting parts, I enjoyed Sarah Appleton as omnipresent waitress, Harriet, and it was she who provided the continuity between the two acts. Equally solid were Linda Malster as Eunice and Alan Camfield as Eugene. Mr Camfield was also credited as Stage Manager for both productions. In the first half we were also introduced to Teresa Thomas as Betty and Anna Ephithite as Annette, who both executed their duties in fine style. The brothers in question were Bob Hammond as Bernie and Burtie Welland as Mike, who both turned in good characterisations but suffered a little at the hands of the prompt (Tina Camfield) who was always there when required.

The number of interventions made the first of the two halves just a little laboured and, as we concluded our mid-session interval and the wonderful tea and cake, the second half

looked a lot sharper as the main protagonists were a lot more confident with their lines. Burtie Welland was back again as Mike, this time more supporting than leading, with the main focus on the two sisters, Teresa Thomas again as Betty and Rosemary Gibson as Rose.

I had already noted that 'Me and My Sister' was to be MTC's entry into the Hunstanton One Act Drama Festival and it looked every bit like it could end up being a major contender! Mrs' Thomas and Gibson were both in sparkling form as the two sisters, delivering well drawn characters with complete confidence in their lines and moves. The two gave performances that had charm and comedy but still managed to ooze pathos when required. The surprise ending ... was actually a complete surprise even if I did see the dead brother coming a way off. With Mr Welland in close attendance, these two female performers really stole the show and it is to them collectively, that I award penultimate paragraph honours.

I can't wait to see this piece revisited in Hunstanton as it can still sharpen up a bit. Over all, the complete production just looked like it could have benefitted from another week in rehearsal, especially the first half, but it was without a doubt a competent piece of writing and a delightful piece of acting. I love watching original drama, and this was well-written and well-presented by a talented group of actors and actresses. My compliments to Director, Sheila Welland, for a faultless piece of technical direction. My only minor gripe on that score might be the scene change to the improvisation class where I did wonder if there really needed to be so much furniture moved. Well done MTC, I can't wait for the next one!

Stephen P. E. Hayter.

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