

Stepping Out • January 2004 • Parkshot

REVIEW

"Stepping Out" is a warm and very funny play about the lives, laughs and loves of a group of women (and one man) attending a weekly tap-dance class in a church hall in North London. We then follow the tap class, from hesitant start, to their first public performance. The play scratches at the surface of each character to reveal hidden secrets, hopes and fears in an entertaining mix of wit and poignancy.

Technical and staging matters were kept simple but effective in creating a realistic set with a sufficiency of staging interest. The fixed set of the village hall was pretty much what you would expect with a raised level for a noticeboard which doubled up as Geoffrey's 'changing room' and of course the obligatory piano. The production had a good feel about it and when the material is as good as this, a good night out is ensured. I felt that some of the cast got deeper into their respective characters than others but perhaps this is also true in life with some people being more outspoken than others. There is a real pot-pourri of characters in this play and we just sit back and see how they all relate and react. Not entirely sure about the time setting though. The play is essentially set in the 1980's and additionally we have 'Rose' referring to herself as the 'token' and yet conversely modern mobile phones were being used.

There was a pleasant mixture of familiar faces and some new ones. Within our circle of characters there is ex-professional dancer, 'Mavis', who runs the class. Annie Deasy was equally assured as the upbeat teacher and then later on when things seemed to be conspiring against her. 'Andy', perceived as a plain do-gooder with no confidence, was expertly played by the diminutive Debs McDowell. Lots of good physical acting and general lowly demeanour played on the emotions. The snobby but well meaning 'Vera' was given the necessary touch of class and good comic timing by Janet Simpson. I loved her stunning silver leotard, but it would have been nice to see some more over the top attire. There was a rather fetching pink number in the second half but it seemed to be permanently covered by a jacket and the comic opportunity was missed. I see 'Vera' as a walking costume parade, with marigolds. Battleaxe's are great parts to watch and Lynne Shirley as 'Mrs Fraser' was no different. She wouldn't be hurried by anyone and her stoic Northern character was an enjoyable contrast. Katie Gagen as timid 'Dorothy', who works in social security, assisted by large circular framed spectacles pushed her character forward in an attempt to be noticed. Likewise, Frances Carroll gave lots of energy to her character, 'Lynne'. Veronica Callow conveyed a colourful personality as the sharp and very shrewd 'Maxine' as did Sheri Desbaux as 'Rose' (the Golden Oldie). Hattie Hahn's quirky portrayal of fairly common and figure conscious 'Sylvia', reminded me a little of Tiffany, Martine McCutcheon's character in Eastenders - compliment honest ! Chris Morris's interpretation of 'Geoffrey', the lone male, was spot on. 'Geoffrey' looked nervous and uncomfortable when relevant and provided many moments of genuine hysterical laughter.

Well done to the Director Edz Barrett for gelling all these disparate characters and bringing out the humour and pathos at about the correct levels. Melanie Edwards choreography was lively enough yet suitable for a bunch of blossoming rank amateurs.

A fantastically supportive audience on the night I attended spurred the performers on and ultimately we all enjoyed a very entertaining evening.

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