

Ladies in Lavender

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Ladies in Lavender is based on the film written and directed by Charles Dance from a short story by William J. Locke and adapted for the stage by Shaun McKenna. It is a gentle — one might almost say genteel — little drama which tells of the impact made on the lives of two elderly sisters by an unconscious stranger who washes up on a beach near their Cornish cottage.

The most immediately impressive aspect of the production was the set; this play necessitates a set which will suggest both floors of a Cornish cottage, the cottage garden, a beach (etc). The way that different areas of the stage were cleverly put together to suggest different spaces in the drama was extremely good. The limited playing space was arranged well.

Angela Bishop and April Murfitt played Ursula and Janet Widdington, the sisters whose lives are changed by the discovery of Andrea, the young Polish violinist who has been swept overboard and washed ashore on a beach near the sisters' cottage. Along with their straight-talking housekeeper Dorcas, the mysterious Olga Danilov and love-lorn Doctor Mead, the sisters are taken with this young stranger and his unexpected presence affects all of their lives.

Angela Bishop brought a poignant touch to Ursula, the lovelorn sister who is most taken with young Andrea with April Murfitt bringing a more no-nonsense and practical air to the role of Janet. One could believe that these characters had a regular routine together which at times brought much amusement to the audience.

No-nonsense housekeeper Dorcas was a vivid creation from Cat Blacker - complete with a rather good Cornish accent which wasn't overdone and therefore much more effective — and her presence added a much welcome addition to the piece, having most of the humorous lines Ms Blacker didn't waste a single one. Her relationship with the sisters gave an insight into the everyday domestic life in the household which added an extra layer of interest to the drama. The social 'pecking-order' and the insight into domestic household politics was very nicely expressed.

Andrea, the Polish violinist being nursed back to life by the Widdington sisters was played by Aidan Bayford. His characterisation was very good, with the initial bewilderment and the simple confusions which were thrown up by the language barrier coming across well.

Chris Brighty brought a nice touch to the role of Dr Mead, taking us with him on his transformation from fussy country doctor to smitten romantic. The object of the good doctor's affections, the mysterious Olga, played by Marie Poujardieu was also very well realised.

To return to the staging. The myriad scene changes were handled as swiftly as possible, though it has to be said that there were a few technical glitches, particularly with sound, on the evening I attended but it wasn't particularly desperate: that said, there was on the other hand a good deal of well chosen music to add an extra dimension to the piece. I would like to make a personal comment about props: no actually my real comment is about the lack thereof. Olga is an artist and however lovely her painting looked to the good doctor, she did not appear to me to have a palette or a paintbox with her; also the doctor's bag could have done with padding out it was so obviously empty. Again, not drastic just a mild frustration to me. That said, props and set dressing were excellent and the period setting was effectively realised, with the well chosen costumes adding to the overall picture.

This was a well judged production from Directors Sarah Smith and Rosemary Jolley which managed to entertain without dipping into the soggy waters of sentimentality, or attempt to sensationalise the subject matter in any way.

My sincere thanks to all at NOMADS for the usual warm welcome and yet another enjoyable evening's entertainment.