

Review of It Runs in the Family by Lance Bassett

For the second production of their season, Banbury Cross Players chose 'It Runs in the Family' from the comic pen of Ray Cooney.

One of the best things about BCP is their eclectic choice of plays in this case pure farce and typical Cooney, popular fare for amateur groups.

The plot is simple, set in a doctors' common room in London based St Andrew's Hospital. Ex-nurse Jane Tate with whom he had an affair some nineteen years ago visits Doctor Mortimore played with great aplomb by the versatile Philip Fine. She had left her job and him suddenly shortly afterwards. Jane has now returned to advise Mortimore he is the father of her son Leslie, who is now eighteen and wants to know who his father is.

There you have it, the rest of the play is taken up with the naughty Doctor Mortimore trying to keep his infidelity from his wife Rosemary and save his marriage and from his boss Sir Willoughby to save his impending knighthood. A simple scenario and one, which encompasses much laughter and comic chaos so typical of this writer. Set in the less politically correct age of 1982, BCP made this play their own with splendid casting who brought the piece alive with cracking pace, fine delivery and comic timing of Cooney's script.

Philip Fine was expertly cast as the errant lead doctor, and mastered the mammoth role, bearing in mind this was the first night of the run, with just one prompt as far as I detected. Trish Thompson played his wife Rosemary, giving an air of being on the staid side and then shocking us all with her own revelation at the end of the night. John McCormick obviously enjoyed his part of Sir Willoughby Drake giving us his full range of overbearing/sober/drunk and bewildered all in one evening. David Smith as Mortimore's sidekick, Dr Hubert Bonney, and the fall guy for his friend's misdemeanours got into the part with gusto after a shaky start where he seemed a little uncomfortable. Fraser McMinn was Dr Mike Connolly whom I hadn't seen before with the BCP. He too played his part enthusiastically but tended to rush his lines. Good performance otherwise.

So, Dr Mortimore sails through the plot causing mayhem, confusion and mirth. When his son Leslie arrives on the set, he is told Dr Bonney is his father and so throws his arms around him being more than happy with the deal. This way he also gets an instant Granny, Bonney's mother played by Ann Westcott.

I have to say the young Leslie was a delight, again I believe a BCP newcomer. A star is born perhaps as Isaac Stuart adapted to his role as the scruffy, manic haired heavy booted teenager whose birth had caused this whole rumpus. Full marks to the young fella, completely convincing.

During the following scenes we are treated to three matrons, when there should only have been one plus a frustrated police sergeant played by Dave Robinson (pity about the trousers) who is desperately trying to find out who is who, well good luck to him. Then there is a scene where poor Leslie is locked in the en suite and escapes out of the window and along the 3rd floor ledge. This is carried out with great hilarity, an excellent piece of comic drama and a tribute to both the set designer Peter Bloor and director Tony Gallager.

The part of Mortimore's amorous attentions back in 1963, the lovely nurse Tate, was performed by Hilary Beaton. She did well looking smart in body and mind and took no nonsense from the by now ailing Dr Mortimore. The tale all ends well (more or less), everybody's happy and the evening finished with a full cast rendition of 'Oh what a night, late December back in '63'. (Nineteen years ago-get it?) Not quite sure about the song and dance routine but the cast and audience seemed to enjoy it.

One highlight of the performance was that of Jem Turner as patient Bill who thinks the Doctor's Common Room is his new private ward. Mr Turner obviously relished the part and quite right too. Being

shoved all over the set and even down stairs at one point (heard but not seen of course). It must have been a great role to play.

The set looked the part and well dressed, perhaps too much round the edge and nothing in the centre to provide focus but with a large cast I can understand the problem. The worst culprits of the evening were the trousers of Dr Bonney (and the policeman) who if you are portraying a successful physician perhaps you shouldn't be sporting trousers that appear a metre too long in the leg, and the shoes could have been shown the Cherry Blossom.

So another star is forged on Banbury Cross Players' Walk of Fame. 'It Runs in the Family' is a hoot from start to finish and from the sounds of the audience they thought the same.

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