

The Birthday Party 2003

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RICHMOND DRAMA AWARDS

Fine production of challenging play

THE strange mixture of humour, pathos and menace that makes up Harold Pinter's play *The Birthday Party* was achieved to a large extent in the Teddington Theatre Company's production in the Coward Room at the Hampton Hill Playhouse last week.

First performed in 1958, it is set in the living-room of a house in a seaside town which Stanley, a man with a dark secret in his past, has made his home.

The landlady, Meg, although good-hearted is self-centred and vain and succumbs easily to flattery. Two gangsters arrive seeking to hire a room and she is too naive to anticipate the danger the pair present to her household. Meg was played with finesse by Sue Bell. Her timing and skill in bringing out the humour in seemingly vacuous lines was brilliant.

Meg's young friend, Lulu, was played with a mixture of seductiveness and innocence by 16 year old Anna Radmore. Her performance was impressively mature but her vocal delivery was much too quiet.

Nick Young was chillingly menacing as the ruthless Goldberg. He dominated the play and skilfully portrayed the changes of attitude required

to seduce a vulnerable young woman and charm a susceptible older woman. His Jewish accent was admirably sustained and did not impede clarity of diction.

Jeremy Sachs was very impressive as the Irish 'heavy' McCann. He managed to convey the great effort and trembling involved in keeping a violent, impatient nature under control. The scenes in which he sat tearing precise strips from the pages of a newspaper I found chilling. His Irish accent was well sustained throughout the play and his diction was always clear.

Steve Boxall gave a well-judged portrayal of the unfortunate Stanley whose gradual subjugation is the core of the play.

The part of Petey, the rather nondescript 'man of the house' was played by Colin Greenhaugh. His is a kindly sympathetic character. He is the only one to sense that all is not well with his regular guest and who makes any effort to prevent him being taken away.

Many congratulations to Director Ben Clare and his team on the subtle mix of humour and menace achieved in this fine production of a challenging play.

JM