

## SEASON'S GREETINGS

To begin: I have to own up to the fact that Alan Ayckbourn is not one of my favoured playwrights, but oddly, Season's Greetings along with Absurd Person Singular are probably my 2 best liked of his plays. Maybe because of my fondness for all things Christmas related, even with all the disasters that trying to create the perfect Christmas can bring. This brings us nicely to the home of the Bunkers, Neville and Belinda who are trying to achieve that very object, despite inviting the guests from hell!!

Poor Belinda, played brilliantly by Karen, stuck in a marriage with utter bore Neville (Colin). Such a shame then, that as the first scene developed Karen was having to decorate the Christmas with a complete lack of decorations. The same piece of tinsel was arranged or fiddled with quite a few times. I would've loved to have seen the use of a small step stool or chair for her to climb on, especially then to make her even more frustrated when no one else seemed willing to help her out.

Can you blame her, then, when her sister's boyfriend arrives, and she is immediately attracted to him. All those lovely sighs and "cow eyes" were a joy to watch and later the "lustful" scene was played with such urgency....loved it.

Colin played Neville with just the right amount of complacency required to be the boring husband. Couldn't you just imagine the 2 sheds in the garden, all full of gadgets..... The timbre of Colin's voice

Rankled with some of the audience around me, but I felt it was right for Neville. Well acted Colin, you kept up your character all the way through.

Harvey, played by Bob, the psychotic security guard with an unhealthy liking for guns, was a superb performance. Talk about armchair acting...a masterclass in watching a blank tv...your great play in misunderstanding Clive's sexuality, the problems during the puppet show, all showed what you are capable of doing, including, on the Thursday, covering up the failed gunshot...what else could you do other than say "Bang"....

Bernard and Phyllis, another hapless couple. Bernard the useless doctor, who couldn't even get the death of Clive right...and Phyllis the alcoholic. David, you were amazing. Your wonderful timing coming in and out of the kitchen with the tales of Phyllis's inabilities with food was perfect. You use your whole body with great effect. Of course I can't fail to mention the puppet show.

Congratulations, that must have taken a lot of rehearsal to get the timing right. Such fun. Carol, what can I say? I certainly didn't envy you the research you had to do to create Phyllis. What a great character she is. I loved the snakes and ladders scene. Pure joy. It's not easy to play a drunk without going OTT, and you certainly didn't. Good job.

Eddie and Pattie (Jared and Grace). Another unhappy couple. Ayckbourn would have us believe that Pattie is being neglected, but the fact that there are children and another on the way would suggest otherwise....Jared, I loved your character betrayal. On occasions you were a little quiet in the delivery of your lines- something to work on for future. I would also have liked to see a bit more eye contact with your other actors, you came over as a little shy....but, that could've been part of your "geeky"

character. Great work at the dining table with Neville. Grace, you coped very well with your bump. Acting pregnant isn't easy. Maybe you could have stretched your back and walked with your hand in the small of your back, like heavily pregnant women do? You came over as a real nag of a wife, which might explain why Neville ignored you....nice performance all in all.

Rachel and Clive ( Claire and Simon): Two rather disjointed people, the most unlikely couple ever. Belinda's sister, Rachel, unmarried and unsure of herself. Claire, I think you gave her an air of sincerity. Constantly soul searching, we could see it in your face. Very emotionally played. And last but not least, Clive, played by Simon. What a performance. Reacting with such warmth to Belinda's advances, again, the "lust" scenes were so real. What else can I say? Not a lot. Great job. Well done.

It is not easy to direct a production and be in it as well. Difficult to see the bigger picture as a rule, but Simon, you seemed to deal with it very well. Given the small space that you had to deal with, creating 3 different areas is not easy. Great use of the stage, and good use of half flats to create the different rooms.

I would say, however, that perhaps more could've been done by the actors with scenes in the hallway when calling through to the other rooms. Maybe more stretching of the neck, or slighter louder voices? I understand that there were divisions on the floor marking out the acting area of each room. Trouble is, after the first three rows, no one can see these, so it is important that when entering each room a more definite move should be made.

Costuming was good...loved the Boxing Day jumpers. Good use of props too. What a shame that the mechanical toy, which stopped the antics under the tree couldn't be seen. Again, placing anything on a low table or the floor, prevents anyone further back from seeing it.

Did you have a prompter? There is no mention of one in the programme. There were a few occasions on Thursday night where I felt a few prompts by a good prompter might have been useful. Just to speed up a few awkward moments.

That being said FADS, it was an enjoyable evening, and a great way to start the festive season.

Congratulations on your award for Off the Hook. Well deserved.

May I wish you all the compliments of the season, and wish you all well for 2015.

Marlene

