



Cornwall Drama Association
a service to amateur drama in Cornwall

THEATRE FESTIVAL 2014 – 2015

PLAYS SECTION

Carnon Downs Drama Group

Perranwell Boys

Seen: 15.10.14

THE PLAY

This was an original script written to commemorate those who served, died and the families affected by the First World War in Perranwell. The script provided a large cast with the opportunity to show so many emotions, from the slightly self-satisfied manner of the middle class family in the opening scene to the class distinction within the group of soldiers and how they reacted to each other and to the heart-rending final moment. The author skilfully combined light and shade interspersing the dramatic and emotional with moments of humour, at the same time educating the audience with some of the history of this dreadful war. The director was presented with the challenge of moving swiftly from one location to another to keep the story interesting and continuous, at the same time introducing singing and poetry reading into the plot.

STAGE PRESENTATION

A curtain set was used with minimal props and furniture. This worked well allowing for fast and smooth scene changes while still portraying the time and place.

The trench and bunkers were built out into the auditorium with the soldiers' dugout stage right and the officers' on the left. Both were adorned with barbed wire and the brown floor and wall covering suggested the incessant mud. The officers' mess contained a field telephone and an enamel teapot while ammunition boxes provided the seating.

The addition of antique chairs and a fire screen allowed an instant glimpse of the drawing room belonging to the Trinick family and the simple addition of a signpost placed us firmly in the village. The recruiting office and the field hospital, played in front of drapes, were simple but effective. The backcloth showed a desolate "No mans land" with stunted shell damaged trees and the inn was furnished with a small bar and sufficient tables and chairs to accommodate the cast.

Properties

Care had been taken to find properties appropriate for the period. The furnishings in the Trinick household were acceptable for the status of the family. The tennis racket was excellent and the Boys Own volume was bang on period. The simple furnishings depicting the recruiting office, and the medical room were all that was required. The tin mugs, enamel tea pot were spot on but just a hint of mud and staining would have

made them more realistic. There were plenty of sandbags and acceptable rifles. The field telegraph looked authentic. The finger post was well made and appreciated by the local audience. The properties used in the Café scene and the field hospital were excellent.

Sound

The sound effects of the battles were good but should have been faded out not cut off abruptly in all instances, although they were always on cue. The field telegraph would have stopped ringing as the receiver was lifted; the amplification was good and loud – but maybe some distortion could have been added in here.

Lighting

The techies were given a tricky job. The faces in the officers' dug out were often hidden from us in the gloom, and eyes were hidden by the peaks of the officers' hats. However, the subdued lighting of the trench was set off by the beautifully lit backcloth. The night patrol worked particularly well as the action was seen in silhouette. Each area was lit as the action changed and we enjoyed Act 1 Sc 3 "Joining Up"

Costume

The ladies' costumes were delightful and it was good that the company bothered to give them changes to depict the passing of time. The gentlemen's 'mufti' was acceptable apart from the very modern footwear. We noted the uniforms had been hired and with so many companies presenting World War One productions we realised that Carnon Downs had to accept what could be provided (missing cap badge, for example). On the whole the uniforms fitted well and the actors all looked comfortable wearing them. The footwear really did need to have been distressed – references to the mud immediately took eyes to the pristine feet and we noticed that Private Williams was not wearing boots. Perhaps the nurse and the doctor at the dressing station could have had more crumpled/less clean uniforms, the doctor especially to distinguish him from the doctor in the medical assessment scene. He obviously was wearing the same coat. The lovely splash of colour from Yvette and Jacqueline created a welcome relief from the unrelenting khaki.

Make-up

Make-up was so subtly applied it was almost non-existent, so right for this period. Ladies' hairstyles were good – the men, with the exception of Alfred, needed to be more 'short back and sides' to be convincing. We felt the soldiers' faces were insufficiently blacked for their night foray.

STAGE DIRECTION

This play contained many short scenes in different locations and spanned many months. The smooth transitions were commendable and all exits and entrances were spot on with characters being held during the use of the auditorium. Throughout this performance the music and songs had been chosen with such care. They were appropriate for the piece and had been practised to be sung well within the range of each of the actors. It added so much to the overall feel of the evening and the cast are to be congratulated on producing such a rich sound. The poems were disappointing. They read well in the script as they started in a light manner and became progressively

darker as the months went by but on delivery the words lost their impact. Perhaps some coaching on the reading of poetry would have been helpful.

Scene 1

This scene looked domestic and the director had placed the furniture so that all faces could be seen during the conversation. Speech was a little quiet, and somewhat rushed but the scene nicely set us up for what was to come.

Scene 2

This was such a well paced scene, and the cream drapes were enough to show change of place. The characters were nicely drawn here.

Scene 3

Another scene where pace was good – the scene with the Recruiting Officer went at a great lick and the references re appropriate education establishments were appreciated by the audience. The recruit was smoothly passed on to the Recruiting Sergeant who certainly conveyed the impression that he had seen all this so many times before, as did the Army Medical Officer with his more than cursory examination. The simple furnishings here were all that was required.

Scene 4

There was a homely glow to this scene and the bustle of the female members to get the special tea prepared contrasted well with the more hesitant approach of the father as he bade his son farewell.

Scene 5

The introduction of the soldiers was busy and disciplined. The moving of the sand bags was done well and everyone lifted and moved them as though they were heavy. The lighting here was sufficient for the trench but did not quite reach into the officers' dug-out. There was a good contrast in the men's voices and delivery pattern, both of which were maintained during the performance.

Scene 6

This was a lively scene and the soldiers had really bonded. We enjoyed their banter. There was good listening and reaction to what was being said here. It was obvious that the director had ensured each actor was aware of the protocol to be observed through the ranks.

Scene 7

There was very good change of mood for this scene as they prepared to investigate no-man's land. The tension was palpable. Perhaps the actual progress of the soldiers was a little repetitive and maybe went on for too long – the audience got restless and began to titter. The reaction from one of the actors to the gun fire was a little slow, but the end to the scene was excellent.

Scene 8

Set in front of cream tabs the camp beds were authentic and the bandaging of the blind man appeared to have been professionally done. As stated above the medical staff were a bit cleanly dressed. Good performance from the blind man; we heard every word.

Scene 9

What a lively, colourful scene we were given in the café providing such a contrast in mood, and again the difference between the ranks was very well displayed. There was good pace and the fun was well pointed.

Scene 10

The build up to the battle – each character was busy with their own thoughts and their anxiety was clear to see. The tableau of the three officers placed outside their dug-out as they discussed the unsatisfactory situation summed up what must have been happening all over Europe at that time. The space was used very well here, and the entrances, exits and marching were smartly executed. The moves, with backs to the audience, spoke volumes. The end of Act 1 was compelling with Archie falling so well and leaving the audience unknowing as to his fate.

Act 2 Scene 1

This scene reminded us about daily life at home. The housewifely chat between Mrs Burley and Johnny was believable. The atmosphere changed with the entrance of the Telegram Boy and we could feel the anxiety it brought.

Scene 2

This was a beautifully played scene, especially between Mrs Trinick and Alfred who told it as it was with great feeling.

Scene 3

There was a totally different pace to this scene which had been very skilfully directed. We felt much apprehension from the Officers and other ranks. The performance of the Sunday worship was perfectly pitched. The breakdown of Brandon was not overplayed and the determination of the troop as they prepared to advance in the battle was heartbreaking. The final advance over the parapet to the accompaniment of tremendous bombardment and the slow drawing of the curtain was so emotive.

Scene 4

This poignant scene, written convincingly, could not fail to have moved everyone in the audience. It was a pity that Mrs Trinick did not allow time to read the telegram before her collapse.

INDIVIDUAL PERFORMANCES

Facial expressions were very important in this production as many times we watched the soldiers on parade when their stillness was paramount. Of particular note was the Sunday Parade when each character responded to the padre's words with appropriate expression allowing the audience to see their unspoken thoughts.

Bevis

This actor built up the character of the young gentleman and inexperienced officer very well. Perhaps he could have shown more command as he became more experienced? The reading of his poems needed more emotion – they obviously were written from the soul of the character.

Alfred

Excellent work from this actor, his face expressed every emotion he felt. His stillness and the utter fear showing in his eyes before finally "going over the top" was gripping. May we suggest he works on his speech and projection; a slightly slower delivery would have helped, particularly in his first scene.

Johnny

We saw a nice performance from an actor showing great promise for the future – he needed to slow his delivery a little but he really was the annoying little brother.

Geraldine

This actor had a good clear voice, and delivered her song beautifully. It was a most enjoyable performance.

Mrs Trinick

We were given a steady performance. Her collapse at end was believable but, as already stated, it was a pity she had not allowed time to read the telegram before collapsing.

Mr Trinick

Good brisk manner, clear voice. Perhaps a little more emotion as he said goodbye to his son would have been acceptable.

Mrs Burley and Mrs Dingle

It is difficult to separate these totally believable characters. Each actor gave an excellent performance.

Recruiting Officer

Good, brisk delivery, good pace and nicely timed performance.

Recruiting Sergeant

Looked suitably bored – but this part was not made into a caricature as it so easily could have been.

Army Medical Officer

The doctor gave a good impression of going about his business processing the volunteers as if they were a production line - which of course they were.

Sgt Bascombe

This was an unflinching performance throughout. This actor was totally convincing; he made us believe in his care and concern for his men.

Private Pascoe

We saw a very well conceived character with convincing mannerisms and responses to all situations.

Private Williams

We believed in this character; he made a good father figure to the young soldier, he was very sympathetic. His singing was a joy to listen to. A good performance.

Captain Sawle.

This actor grew in strength as the play progressed. During the second half his character really came off the page, and he showed his frustration with his superiors well.

Lt. Brandon

We were given a very firm delivery from this actor who appeared totally at home in his part. He had a good speaking voice and he built a believable relationship with Bevis. His collapse was so well done and heartbreaking.

Col. Turner

This actor brought his character off the page and his air of authority was maintained. He had a good bluster when being mimicked.

Nurse

This actor showed a very attentive manner but, as referred to above, her costume was far too clean which did not help her convince us of the horror of her job.

Wounded soldier

We were unable to see much of this character due to the excellently applied bandages, but his clear speech brought home the horrors of the battle and the aftermath that so many young men had to face.

Yvette

This was a beautifully performed role complete with French accent. She made eye contact and flirted shamelessly with the soldiers.

Mme Denise

This was a good portrayal of the café proprietor, with a very well sustained accent.

Old Frenchwoman

A faultless performance.

Jaqueline

Such a contrast to her earlier role, this actress provided a colourful, glamorous and lighthearted moment during the scene in the bar. She had a lovely face and flirtatious smile.

Telegram Boy

Efficient, purposeful movement on the stage this actor showed stillness and compassion.

Army Chaplain

Pitched at just the right level this was a sincere performance.

Boy

Well played, good clear voice – but would he not have shown just a bit more awe of his Commanding Officer?

Endeavour, Originality and Attainment

This was a powerful piece of theatre and the extremely strong cast moved us to laughter and tears. Characters had been well developed and between the soldiers we witnessed the brotherhood and camaraderie that flourishes between men of different backgrounds in times of adversity. The curtain call was dignified and retained the feeling of the last scene. Thank you for giving us a thought provoking evening.

As always your hospitality was greatly appreciated.

Coral Pepper Dip RSA and Wendy Jones, ADB
Joint Moderating Adjudicators (Plays)