

*Dangerous Corner* at Salisbury Playhouse, 31 January - 23 February 2013.

As I was waiting for the performance of *Dangerous Corner* at the Salisbury Playhouse to start, I was a little worried about the people in the row behind - a family with three excitable teenage girls, clutching their water bottles and bags of sweets. As they settled down, Mum said to them- 'It's not a musical, you know, girls. You've got to listen to what they say.' Mum had obviously not prepared the girls for a one-set play, with people talking for two hours and little action. Would they be able to stay the course without whispers and sweet wrapper rustling?

I am pleased to report that Priestley weaved his magic from the opening blackout with the sound of gunshot and woman's scream which made everyone jump and gasp to, well, the sound of gunshot and woman's scream at the end of the play, still making us jump. When the interval came after Olwen's revelation that Martin had not committed suicide, the family broke into excited chatter about who did it, who was involved, the girls guessing that sugar-sweet Betty was not what she appeared to be. Father joined in, announcing, 'That Martin chap sounds quite a guy. I'd like to have met him.' Not sure what that said about him but I thought that showed how real the characters had become to them and how involved they were in the story.

Gareth Machin's production captured the many aspects of Priestley's complex play. The actors conveyed the manners and speech of the 1930s period well and the affluent looking, comfortable solid Art Deco style set of the Caplan's drawing room was an effective contrast to the veneer of respectability and social stability. The drama evolved through the slow revelation of the truth behind Martin's death when the individuals in this rather smug group of friends are forced to confess to the part they played in events leading up to his death. Reminiscent of the unravelling of the truth at the Birlings in *An Inspector Calls*, we waited for the events to come round all over again - in this case, the opening of the musical cigarette box.

The use of the time shift, a feature of JBP's plays, really hasn't been bettered by anyone else on stage. In fact, I'm not sure I know of any other playwright who does this. Ayckbourn, perhaps, but he mainly plays around with parallel time frames. Like any good thriller or detective story, it is the complex characters and their relationships which underpin the crime or key event. The bickering and wrangling among the friends gives way to a deeper level of psychological insight into the nature of love and how little we really know of those with whom we share our lives.

Pandora's Box was opened and the secrets escaped. At the end, when the moment of opening the cigarette box was replayed as Robert fiddled with the wireless, the music burst forth and the lid was closed, there was an audible sigh of relief from the row behind. The characters paired off, dancing elegantly and happily around the stage, changing partners to and fro, one declining, another accepting, once again the sophisticated, assured and contented people they had

been at the beginning. But the audience now knew, how fragile such moments as these can be, and how the world can turn on the spin of a coin, the roll of a dice or a disturbance on the airwaves.

Dee La Vardera