

Memories Are Made Of This

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| DATE | 1st April 2023 |
| SOCIETY | Bispham CastAways |
| VENUE | Holy Family Church Hall, North Shore, Blackpool |
| TYPE OF PRODUCTION | Play |
| DIRECTOR | Lesley Amos |
| WRITTEN BY | Linda McKenzie |

Report

Author: Clare Higgins

It was a pleasure to be welcomed back to another production by Bispham Castaways and, on this occasion, I was treated to the world premiere of a new drama entitled *Memories Are Made Of This*, written by the Castaways' own Linda McKenzie. Described by director Lesley Amos as "a thoughtful play that isn't a mystery, when you get to the final curtain", it really did keep the audience guessing right to the very end. My guest and I formulated three different theories between us about what was happening as we watched the drama unfold and all three of them were incorrect (although I do like to think one was vaguely in the right ball park!). I will be taking care not to give away any spoilers as I write this. The action takes place across five days, all of it occurring in an East Yorkshire living room belonging to the central character Louise. This was Linda's debut as scriptwriter and I was pleased to hear there are more in the pipeline, as I felt this was a very well-constructed, clever narrative. I really enjoyed the moment when the truth was revealed and I could look back and piece together all the little hints and clues along the way – not only in the dialogue but also in the almost imperceptible changes to set décor and costumes as the drama unfolded. Congratulations Linda on a

right amount of movement around the small stage and cast interaction with each other and with the set, to ensure it never felt stagnant.

Andrew Welsh was the only cast member to play two roles: David, a Liverpudlian priest and Tommy, an associate of some of the other characters. I must congratulate Andrew on his complete transformation between the two; not simply the use of a hat and different accents (which were convincing by the way) but the whole demeanour, expression and total embodiment of each character. If I hadn't read the programme beforehand, it wouldn't have been instantly obvious these were the same person – good work!

Tracy Johnson's convincing portrayal of the grieving, confused and anxious Louise was central to the success of this piece as a whole; if she hadn't been believable, the storyline would have collapsed. At times I would have liked to see a little more contrast in facial and vocal expression to highlight the difference between the darker and lighter moments Louise was experiencing but overall, Tracy was fully committed to her character and played a big part in maintaining the mystery of story. Knowing the ending, I could see an argument for playing Louise with less contrasting expressions, so if that was the intention, forgive me. Just a minor note; be mindful not to speak outwards looking directly at members of the audience when the action is supposed to be kept within the 4th wall and isn't directed to break it.

Hayley Price put her strong character acting skills to good use as Frankie and provided some lighter moments of comic relief with her fabulous facial expressions and physical movements. However, in the next breath she was doing a fine job of portraying her character's empathic side, providing numerous cups of tea whilst also leading the story along through her believable interactions with other characters. A well-rounded portrayal, well done.

Playing Harry was Harry Chambers – I really enjoyed his performance which I felt was the most natural and comfortable to watch. As an audience member I appreciate being able to relax whilst I watch a performance and I instantly felt confident enough in Harry to do so. He certainly kept me on my toes as I never guessed he was who he turned out to be until the very end.

Helen Findlay provided a fabulously over the top portrayal of spiritualist Izzy and this was another fully committed performance; I've never met Helen in real life but if I discovered she is just like Izzy it wouldn't surprise me because her performance felt that authentic. Ian Dodd made a very convincing, Bridge playing Charles who, although we don't know it until the end, is very

believable as the person he turns out to be, with his manner of speech, posture and mannerisms. Evelina Julin and Martin Thompson rounded off the supporting cast as Susan and Richard who play an important role in keeping the storyline and mystery going. They both seamlessly blended into the action (in a good way!) and even though they were smaller parts, they each had clear characters which came through and they were integral to the amusing Bridge sequences, which I really enjoyed. Well done Evelina for dealing so professionally with the missing water in the glass situation, without so much as an extra blink!

I believe this performance was put together in just over two months and on the whole, it was performance ready but there were a few minor moments which did feel a little awkward, probably due to being a little under rehearsed e.g. handing out the tea cups from the tray, some of the crying scenes dragging a little as if trying to remember the next line and the two prompts required in the second half – well done Nicky Alladice.

That being said, I would certainly say this premiere was a success and I look forward to future offerings from the Castaways.