

Camp Cutthroat

DATE	15th July 2023
SOCIETY	Bispham CastAways
VENUE	Holy Family Church Hall
TYPE OF PRODUCTION	Play
DIRECTOR	Debbie Flavell
WRITTEN BY	Belladonna Mysteries

Report

Author: Nathan Benson

Many thanks to Bispham CastAways for inviting me to their production of 'Camp Cutthroat' written by Belladonna Mysteries, at Holy Family Church Hall on Saturday 15th July. This, to me, was a community-style, interactive Murder Mystery, where the audience was encouraged to actively participate from the get-go; laid out on the cabaret-style tables was a quiz for their guests to start working their way through. My guest and I were placed at a table with 3 ladies whom we had never met, so we had a treat to team up with them and get to know them a little. The show was in 3 acts, each unwinding the intricate murder story further. In the intervals, we were served a hotpot and apple pie supper, which was another delicious treat. The audience was allowed to probe the cast twice to help decipher who the murderer was before the grand unveiling at the end. The play itself centred around an adventure campsite run by Chrissy Cliff and Capt. Curtis Cliff. We learn there is trouble between the couple as Chrissy had been sleeping with Capt. Curtis' best friend. We then meet the guests one by one, who were all various colleagues with differing ambitions at Turlington's Troche. The last of the characters, Riley Rapporto, a reporter, is also in attendance at the event. Various plot lines were carefully interwoven, and the mystery killer assassinates 4 of the characters. All the remaining characters were very suspicious and could have their motives for the murders.

Directed by Debbie Flavell, the night was a roaring success, from looking around the hall, every audience member was engaged with the evening, and there wasn't a single person who wasn't perplexed, deliberating the clues and scenarios, therefore showing that the piece was delivered and produced a great evening of entertainment which

served their audience well. There was a good pace to the production; there was a lot of information to take in to keep up, so the pauses were well placed to aid with digestion. From a staging point of view, the piece worked well, with good use of all of the available space, there were a couple of blocking issues where dialogue was set to the extremities of stage right or left which meant the action was blocked from some of the audience's views, which could have been brought further downstage to ensure these moments weren't lost. There was a nice blend of characterisations which were drawn out, some naturalistically played, others more caricatured. If this was a straight play, I would have preferred a consistent portrayal, but as this was a murder mystery night, I think that this worked quite well and added some humorous undertones to the production. Some sensitive subject matters were written into the script; all were dealt with tact & decency.

The show was run on a minimal budget, but this did not matter one bit. The set consisted of a sky backdrop on top of a painted wood scene which could be seen at the bottom. There were 2 upstage entrances, one covered in tarpaulin depicting a tented area, another a painted door. There was a bench placed centre stage and in front of it, a campfire. There were 2 curtained entrances on each side of the downstage and an additional exit which was accessed by coming off the stage and in front of the audience. Costumes were provided by the cast and all were detailed and suited to the characters. The lighting was a basic flood which faded to different saturations, with some colour added to highlight some of the sinister scenes, again simple, but it did the job well.

The cast were of differing acting experience and abilities, which made the night ever so more charming; everyone was unpretentiously committed to each moment of the show. I was particularly impressed with the commitment to characterisation through the interrogations, each actor remained to their character and narrative through the improvisation. After the show, I was delighted to learn that this cast was fully inclusive, including members who were partially deaf, and members who have Aspergers and Cerebral Palsy. The society made accommodations to support any accessibility requirements (for example, the prompt was asked to speak louder when needed.) Diversity and Inclusion is a subject matter close to my heart and I believe it should be celebrated and noted, so my heartfelt thanks for being such a welcoming and inclusive society, theatre has many purposes, but it is well and truly for all!

Susan Hope and Ian Dodd played the campsite owners Chrissy and Capt. Curtis Cliff. Both played these parts well and were believable at all times, with a depth of thought process transparent through their eyes.

Harry Chambers played Teddy Turtington III, who was the executive owner of Turtington's Troche, the creator of Acupro, a rushed-through drug with suicidal side effects, and who took investment in the company from the mafia. He played this character very well and took him through a range of emotions, always internalised and

subtly played. We also saw the stuntman in him as he threw himself off the stage and over a bench.

His latest love interest, Piper Patterdale, was played by Hayley Price, who shone in this role. Her character was multilayered, playing on her sultry side for Teddy to manipulate him, also pregnant with Curtis' baby after he rescued her from the Mafia where she was convinced to become an adult movie star. She approached this role with both depth & animation, to help portray the multiple visages.

Suzanne McEachran and Charlie Towers played Talia Turtington and Dr Kennedy Kimiko, a love couple with a plan to take over the Executive Board and bring a new wonder drug, with homicidal side effects, into succession. Great characterisations were brought by both of the pair, Talia more erratic and decisive, and Dr Kennedy with calm and kindness radiating.

Tracy Johnson played transgender accounts executive Gillian Goldson. She played this part with urgency and vulnerability, ridden with guilt about whether her stolen loan to pay for her surgery will be exposed, and conflicted over the company's values as her daughter had attempted suicide after taking the drug.

Helen Bailey and Janette Worker played additional workers at the company, Lucy Lofthouse and Dr Suzy Sonder. Both were nicely played, although I felt a little more confidence would have improved their performances. Our table was chuckling over Lucy wanting to sack the whole firm, I am unsure if this was intended to be comical, but it was endearing all the same.

Martine Bell played the news reporter Riley Rapporto with a great presence. She was grounded and controlled, which provided a good contrast to the other characters.

Finishing the cast was Katie Ashworth as The Figure, who swooshed across the stage and interacted with the audience as a menacing stranger who committed the murders... But which of these wonderful characters was this stranger?!

Thanks again for inviting me to see your show and I look forward to seeing more in the future!