

ROTHERFIELD PLAYERS PERFORM JIM CARTWRIGHT'S "ROAD"

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If you have ever looked at one of Lowry's bleaker pictures and wondered where all the stick people go, and what do they do – watch this searing piece of performance art, in this instance brilliantly directed and produced by Alan Powell and Andrea Butler. There was so much going on in the hall on so many mini-stages that just to get people in the right place at the right time was a triumph of organisation, but to extract such energy and pathos from some thirty amateurs makes this a directorial tour de force.

Lets start then with what Alan has achieved with some of the newer faces on the Players team – we have not seen either Ali Close or Emma Harrison in significant parts before, but both of their cameos of hopeless longing for fulfilling love were extraordinary renditions of pathos and endurance. Jimmy Powell as would be soldier lover to Emma's Helen was a convincing drunk. Alan also successfully instilled poise and confidence in the youngest members of the cast, they could so easily have been overwhelmed by the intense despair around them but Libby McCarthy, James Jenkins, Beth Campbell and Georgie Golding all played their supporting roles with real presence. Eliza Close as Claire was a fine malleable foil to Michael Stanton's Joey – both convincingly overwhelmed by the apparent pointlessness of their futures.

As this mad, sad, northern 1980's Saturday night alternately stumbles and rollicks along till dawn, ageing lothario Scullery loosely knits the various vignettes of the other actors lives into an almost coherent thread – Graham Scott fizzes with energy in the role, whilst also allowing glimpses of underlying angst. Cartwright draws clever contrasts between characters of similar age – James Gallifant's touchingly sad and lonely ex-RAF serviceman Jerry has as its alto ego Alison Organ's wonderfully charismatic but totally dotty Molly, whilst Jacky Jenkins fills Brenda with a determination to go out fighting, preferably not sober!

Contrasting with all the emotional carnage, some lighter, brighter notes are joyously given by Jess Hardy and Gussie Penny as everyone's favourite sluts, whilst further along the path of life Ros Williams as Marion and Brian Wright somehow manage to deftly contrast ribald humour and life's essential disappointment in only a few minutes on stage.

The frozen tableau which started the second half of the piece sticks in the mind as dramatic and disciplined - we can still see Clare Carruthers frozen "O", other flashes come back of Charlie Tick as Barry, lost in anger he cannot articulate; Skinlad Laurance De Rosa and Professor Adam Hardy on their own search for identity in the morass of depression; Stacy Brackley as Chantal putting a brave face on life and both David Penny as dirty DJ Bisto and Paul Philpott's Manfred adding splashes of authentic colour, as did Alan Varley and Heather Block in their cameos.

Of course none of this would have worked with Team Tasker creating convincing and workable sets, or the costumes cleverly assembled by Helen Gallifant and Sue Exton. There is never enough space to mention all the backstage support but a production of this size requires real commitment from a lot of people.

Saving some of the most powerful deliveries to the end the foursome of Kate Awcock and Becky Syms – two girls picked up and taken home by likely lads Barry Shyvers and Christian Jarvest, fed off the energy generated by the whole cast to deliver a hauntingly despairing intro into the grand finale that can only be described as epic.

Overall a brilliant, high energy and passionate interpretation of this classic script that alternately shocked, amused, puzzled and provoked the audience.

Peter Thompson