

**BAZAAR & RUMMAGE** by Sue Townsend  
Performed by Viva      Directed by Gail Baker

Sue Townsend creates humour and pathos in equal measure in many of her plays and it was certainly apparent in this one. This play first hit the stage over 30 years ago, with an all female cast of six, and although some of the content is a little dated all the issues are still relevant.

Set in the 80's it revolves around a jumble sale set up by volunteer "social worker" Gwenda to help three agoraphobia sufferers to confront their fears. She is assisted by Fliss who is a frustrated trainee Social Worker as she can't get access to classes to learn her stuff. The three agoraphobics, Katrina, Bell-Bell and Margaret all have their own issues as to why they became housebound and this is revealed throughout the play and at times is quite harrowing. Katrina, an avid fan of Barry Mannilow, is a frustrated singer who once had a career in the business, and is under the control of her husband Maurice. Bell-Bell has stayed at home cleaning since her husband died, and Margaret has been housebound for 15 years after a harrowing experience revealed later in the play.

This is an extremely funny play and all the characters carried out their roles extremely well and the author had us all laughing early on so that we wouldn't feel awkward laughing later on when the reasons for the three ladies incarceration become evident. There was some very strong language in this play but it was not offensive and fitted the characterisations portrayed. There were several songs in the production (music by Shirlie Roden), all of which were a bit quirky and fun and all were performed to a good standard, with some nice harmonies.

The Brook had been given a "church hall" feel with church notices on boards around the auditorium together with the requisite officious caretaker (David Tickner) in control of the audience and the hall keys! The stage was reminiscent of every village hall across the country, a few tables, odd chairs, a picture of the Pope, a statue of Jesus, a piano (they always have one!) "no smoking notices" etc. There were a great many props used in this production and there were very specific props items detailed in the dialogue and all these had been well sourced, all adding to the feeling of a proper Rummage sale. The wardrobe was great and the clothes really matched all the characters. What an amazing set of costumes for Katrina, from her over the top ex-show costumes to her understated Barry Mannilow T-shirt. Make-up for this production was also very good.

When a play has to be carried by only a handful of people it is really important that you have some very strong actors to take on these roles. Luckily strong female actors are something that Viva is not short of. **Mary Barnes** played the part of self-elected leader and snob Gwenda well and you truly felt that she really wanted to control these people. Mary also did a good job of showing the tragic side of her character in relation to her father's passing, overall hers was a good portrayal. **Anthea Kenna's** take on the placid clean freak Bell-Bell was lovely, constantly cleaning - even the Hoola-Hoop!. She also had a great singing voice and her fur coat song was great. **Sarah Shorney** was very funny indeed in the role of Katrina. Sarah's characterisation of Katrina was pretty much spot on and she managed to wring so much extra humour out of the role with her looks, gestures and constant re-application of lipstick, all without losing any of the emotional impact. Sarah's was truly a star turn.

However, there were star turns all over the place, in this production, and another one was brought to the stage by **Hannah Schunmann**, as Fliss. she really brought a lot of pathos, compassion and empathy to this role. **Vicki Jolleyman**, as the WPC did well with a very small role, coming on for the last couple of pages of the play she was at a disadvantage, as the other actors had built such depth to their characters.

Rounding off the cast was the always first-rate **Kirsten Martin**, playing the part of the straight talking Margaret, a definite foil for the prim and proper Gwenda. She brought the role of Margaret to life effortlessly, bringing some real heart to the portrayal, even if she did use enough language to make the Vicar of Dibley blush, whilst still managing to elicit a lot of sympathy for her character. Kirsten's was definitely the stand out performance of the night, which is no mean task when you are performing against actors who were all firing on all cylinders.

Overall, this was a thoroughly enjoyable performance of a funny play, that had good emotional impact and a message about overcoming your fears. Director **Gail Baker** must have been very pleased with the end result and of her cast, and rightly so. A few little issues aside, this was definitely a quality performance and you could tell that everyone on that stage was having a blast and enjoying working together.