

NODA review

DAD'S ARMY
Viva.

"Best loved" and "legend" are adjectives bandied about freely these days but both certainly describe the Perry and Croft classic comedy series "Dad's Army". Few people, if any, can have escaped seeing either the original series or the constant flow of repeats plus, of course, the Dad's Army Museum in Thetford which allows ardent fans to absorb even more information about this famous series.

Replicating it on stage then is a challenge. So iconic and well-known is Dad's Army that an audience expect actors to recreate the famous characters. Actors, in turn, do need to have a reasonable likeness to and mannerisms of the characters. This, I am pleased to say, is what Director Frank Crosby managed to achieve in large measure, in particular with Godfrey and Fraser.

Technically the show worked well. The set (Philip Midgley) was very church hall-ish with the office stage right. It all worked very well with excellent posters on the wall and good props (Jacki Kennedy). Costumes (Gail Baker and Sarah Dowd-Crosby) were extremely good. There was some pretty impressive military hardware by James Wood too. Stage Manager Alison O'Connor did an excellent job organising some swift scene changes by the ancillary members of the cast.

The well known Dad's Army theme tune played the Walmington-on-Sea platoon to the stage and the large screen stage left projected the scenes and locations and, at the end, the cast credits. This was an extremely well thought out evening, consisting of three television episodes, Mum's Army, The Godiva Affair and The Deadly Attachment together with The Floral Dance (written for the stage show) and the addition of a Concert Party. The latter got things off to a rousing start with a couple of patriotic songs and made one or two other contributions throughout the evening including an excellent "Andrews' Sisters" number culminating in the emotive "We'll Meet Again" for the finale.

In Mums Army the ladies more than held their own with Sarah Boor as an enthusiastic Mrs Fox, Chloe Grimes a fussy Mrs Pike, Emma Gilbey as soto-voiced Ivy Samways, Kerry Hibbert as Walker's flighty usherette girlfriend Edith Parish, Jenny Taylor-Surrudge as the leggy Miss Ironside, Vicki Jellyman as Mrs Hart, Justine Whitworth as Mrs Prosser and Mary Barnes as Mainwaring's love interest Mrs Gray.

In The Godiva Affair the men were called upon to become Morris dancers and were joined by Rob Heaven, the real life Squire of the SlackMaGirdle Border Morris side, as Private Day showing his skill on the accordion and keeping the dancers on course until a fight broke out with the whiffling sticks. Three ladies added swimsuit glamour in the Lady Godiva competition but they were beaten to the crown by Mrs Mainwaring who, fortunately for everyone, was only "seen" in the distance. Great fun.

The Floral Dance gave the whole cast the opportunity to show off their vocal talents. Here once again there was great team work with various members singing the instrument lines and Jones volunteering to sing the solo section, thereby carrying out everyone's expectation of not quite making it on time.

Probably the best known episode of the evening was The Deadly Attachment. Once again this involved the whole cast with Lawrence Whitworth and the ladies doubling as (stubble-chinned) German U-boat crew members and David Blyth as the U-boat Captain.

This scene also saw a nice little cameo from James Wood as The Colonel.

There were some great supporting roles not least by Andy Gillet as Hodges and Keith Gallois as The Verger. - complete with duster tucked into his belt! Without exception though all supporting players deserve mention Vicky Jelleyman as various waitresses, Dave McCalpin (Private Sponge), David Moat as Mr Gordon, Sammy Williams, Judith Collingswood & Jenny Taylor-Surrudge The Andrews' Sisters and all members who made up the Concert Party.

Without exception the cast of the Walmington-on-Sea platoon threw themselves into their roles. Rob Barton's Captain Mainwaring was very believable with good mannerisms and excellent facial expressions. After an initial flutter of first night nerves he grew into the character extremely well.

His delivery of the famous “Don’t tell him Pike” line was beautifully done and only anticipated by the audience (who roused a cheer!).

Rowan Maulder maintained the Sergeant Wilson stance amazingly well and again recreated the wonderful laid back delivery of the character.

David Tickner gave us the anticipated one-second behind performance as Corporal Jones. He dragged every ounce of humour from his character.

Scott Robinson was excellent as the cheeky spiv Private Walker. The only thing his character lacked was the surreptitious cigarette.

James Crussell dealt with the challenge of Private Pike superbly well. There was added pressure on this young man on opening night as Ian Lavender - the original Private Pike - is not only a Viva Patron but was also in the audience.

Vaughan Moll was a virtual doppelgänger for the original Private Godfrey. A lovely performance.

Geoff Fisher was Private Frazier personified. What a great performance. Viva couldn’t possibly have had John Laurie but Mr Fisher was the next best thing.

This was an excellent production, a fun evening revisiting some famous and “best loved” characters portrayed by talented performers. Viva’s Dad’s Army deserves a medal.

Julie Petrucci

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