

## OTTERSHAW PLAYERS

### 'WHOSE LIFE IS IT ANYWAY?' – JUNE 2007

Once again OP presented a super play for the public to enjoy, but sadly not nearly enough of them did so. Peter appears very philosophical regarding the lack of audience but after so much hard work for everyone involved it must be very disappointing. We did speak in the interval about the choice of play and the reticence shown by the average amateur theatregoer to see anything out of the ordinary, but I can appreciate that the company likes a challenge and perhaps that makes it all worthwhile.

Whilst the subject matter of the play could be expected to be morbid it was far from it. I had seen the play before, a professional production, and I must say that overall yours was as good if not better.

The set was super, congratulations to the talented team who designed and built it, and having it on view with the patient in bed immediately created a hospital ambience on entering the auditorium. The furniture used was absolutely right and I was most impressed by not only the hospital props but also by the mannerisms and routines of the 'medical staff'. Having trained at The Royal London Hospital, plus numerous spells as an inpatient over the ensuing years I am familiar with both aspects of hospital life and the attention to detail was remarkable. The blue lighting enhanced the clinical atmosphere, as did the business conducted by the nurses before the play started.

As the quadriplegic Ken Harrison, Graham Collier gave an outstanding performance. I saw Graham in his first role with ACT when he played Lun Tha in 'The King and I' and his confidence and ability has increased enormously. In the role of Ken he was light-hearted and constantly produced witticisms for the benefit of the staff, that is until the futility of his situation over-rode the brave front. His dignified fight to end what he believed was a pointless existence was touching and thought provoking.

Julia Stevens made a classic Sister Anderson, efficient and imperious and Chloe Wigmore as Nurse Kay Sadler showed her freshness to the profession by being warmer and less officious.

The down to earth male nurse John, played by Mark Holton, was the only member of staff who treated Ken normally, and although at the start Mark delivered his lines a little too quickly he settled into the part and performed well.

Two other nicely contrasting characters were Dr Claire Scott and Dr. Michael Emerson and Ellie Bradley and Sandy Hurle played the roles strongly. Sandy Hurle was the stereotyped arrogant Consultant, off handed and full of his own importance. His bombastic demeanour in the role was perfect.

Ellie Bradley was very good as the young, caring doctor who was still able to regard the patient as an individual and not a case number.

Danny Sparkes epitomised the social worker Mrs. Boyle who adhered strictly to her training by not getting emotionally involved with the patient, almost to the point of ignoring Ken as a person. She also gave a good performance as Dr. Rachel Barr who helped Ken achieve his chosen outcome.

The two lawyers were suitably played by Andrew Bradley and Stewart Mison, with the latter giving a splendid characterisation as the psychologist Dr Paul Travers who was utterly indifferent to Ken's argument.

As Mr. Justice Millhouse, Bob Day was a little unsure of his lines from time to time, which didn't help to establish the commanding air of a JP.

In the small role of Peter Kershaw, Bill Jackson was fine but occasionally his dialogue was rather rushed.

Costumes were suitably chosen for the different characters, but Justice Millhouses' trousers were too long. It would have been better to forgo the overcoat as it was difficult for him to get it on, or maybe one of the lesser mortals should have helped him with it considering his elevated position?

My only other comment regarding costume is that Chloe should have removed her ankle chain. No sister worth her salt, and certainly not Sister Anderson, would allow a nurse on duty to wear an ankle chain.

The cast were self assured and convincing in their role portrayal and there were some especially good moments of expression and dialogue. The argument between the doctor and the lawyer when Dr Emerson was treated to a drop of his own medicine, if you'll pardon the pun, by the solicitor was one of them.

The lighting was well plotted and operated, I liked the fluorescent bars on the ward and offices and the sound effects were good. The music chosen was eminently suitable for the play.

Congratulations to Peter; his vision and direction were super. I will look forward to seeing 'Treasure Island' in December.

Thank you for inviting me to the production and also for your usual kind hospitality shown to my guest and I on the evening.

E. Gloria Smith  
NODA Representative – Region 12