

Lord Arthur Savile's Crime by Constance Cox
based on a story by Oscar Wilde.
Performed by the Grayshott Stagers – November 13th 2015.

I knew very little about this play (well in fact nothing) so I did a little research the night before and loved the trailer that the team had put together to advertise the show on the Stagers website. Short, witty and tempting and a keyhole to what the performance was going to be about. I was intrigued.

What I love about going to see productions by the Grayshott Stagers is that the production starts from the moment when you arrive. With directions for parking, a smiley hello at the door, friendly ushering to your seats and programme sellers that aren't pushy and if you have time before you ease yourself into your seat and relax, there is a bar. It's certainly a team effort and it's lovely to see actors and stars from previous shows actively taking part in the essential roles needed off stage as well as on.

The Village Hall was full. Every seat taken. Had the Stagers managed to secure some actor that hadn't been lured by the temptation of the jungle with Ant & Dec? Was this a show that everyone else knew about that I just had never heard of? Or it could be that Grayshott Stagers know just how to stage a show and have avid and loyal supporters. It was lovely to be part of a full and anticipative audience.

A little light music to set the tone of the early 1900's and the curtains opened to a wonderfully dressed set with authentic décor and sensible sized furniture, which didn't take up the whole stage. It's been very easy in the past few years to use minimalist sets (although sometimes necessary) and let the audience imagine a drawing room but I had had a very busy week and was glad that I didn't have to use my brain and imagine anything. It was all there. Tick.

The play commences with Lord Arthur Savile discussing the arrangements of his impending wedding, with his life long butler, Baines played superbly by Ian Wilson-Soppitt who also directed the production. There were strong hints of the late Sir John Gielgud from his performance as Hobson in the film Arthur and it was perfect for the character of Harold Baines. Butlers usually only feature as small roles in plays so I was delighted that Baines was a principal role and with Ian taking the part he did justice to the author and credit to himself. Tick.

Steffen Zschaler took the title role and took it he did. The part commanded a talented actor who would receive the apathy of those watching as Lord Arthur is unfortunately advised by a Cheiromantist (a palm reader to you and me) that he will in his future commit a murder. In order not to mar his married life, he decides that he will commit the crime before his nearing nuptials. Steffen played the luckless Lord with great aplomb and after watching him perform in The 39 Steps last year, the Stagers have added another talented actor to their directory.

Initially he opts to murder his Aunt, Lady Clementina Beauchamp – by poisoning her, which quickly backfires when Lord Arthur drinks the fated potion bestowed for her. Lady Clem was played naughtily, but very nicely by Marion Homer, who brought her own brand of charm and made the once vivacious vixen into a favourite Aunt.

Moving on to his next victim, Paul Bailey was delightful as the forgetful uncle who happened to be the Dean of Paddington. He was frustrated with the forever changing dates of the wedding and I love the versatility Paul has from this role as the amnemonic ancestor to the

pantomime dame with other societies in the area.

Lord Arthur needs to be deemed as a suitable suitor for her daughter. Sara Wilson-Soppit relished in her role as Lady Julia Merton with some beautifully delivered delicious retorts to Lady Windermere, haughtily and eloquently portrayed by Jennifer Charters. Lady Merton looked for every possibility to stop Lord Arthur from marrying her daughter and was delighted at the prospect her guest Mr Podgers would put a stop to the ceremony. Ellis Nicholls looked quite the part as a posing fortune teller and was quite convincing that this was his daytime job.

I was very easily distracted by the plumes and the accessories that the wardrobe ladies had cleverly combined and cross used. The height of elegance and refinery. Mary Coyte and Pauleen Dowsett had the best dressed ladies and I just wondered where they find the time to do this when they are so generous with their time and commitment to so many different ventures. The coiffuring too, deserves a mention. Tick.

Rachel Perkins was a treat as the want to be bride, telling her fiancée, Lord Arthur that he was naughty to try and kiss her before they were married and promptly went in for the kill herself. She played the role with oh so much innocence but with as much keenness that her future husband should go ahead with the murder before their wedding could take place. I really enjoyed the performance Rachel gave as Sybil Merton. Where does one get all the dynamite and explosives needed to post to relatives and relations and where do you find an exploding umbrella? Why just find a passing anarchist aka Herr Winkelkopf or locally known as John Hilder. Absolutely hilarious and John retained his European accent throughout as well as his extravagant antics which were part of his bozo plots and plans.

Lastly, but by no means by least, Gloria Simpson was the ever so obliging maid called Nellie. She was clear to hear, sweet and charming and played the part very convincingly. Another tick.

In fact I couldn't find anywhere to place a cross and everyone really played their part in making this a fantastic show. It's great to know that period plays are still very much alive in the local theatre with great attendance and that they still carry a great weight of worth all these years later.

So it was ticks for everyone and I left feeling rewarded, uplifted and very pleased that I had been. Tick! Well done Ian Wilson-Soppitt! You should be very proud of the team, the society and yourself!

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