

EOH DRAMA REPORT 2019-2020

A rich and exciting half of Eton drama kicked off with a production of *While the Sun Shines* in the Caccia Studio. With deft direction from Angus Graham Campbell an assured company from PAH transported the audience to a London bachelor's apartment in the 1940's. Rowan Hamilton's hapless naval rating struggling to keep his sanity amid a series of escalating romantic encounters in Rattigan's comedy of English manners. Goad proved a revelation as the blustering prospective father-in-law.

The Producers, the largest musical in a decade at the Farrer, was a triumph of satire and sequins. Masterminded by ML, and with an extraordinary skilled orchestra and chorus, the effervescence and unrivalled joy of the performances brought the audience to their feet on all three nights. Harvey Allchurch (HWTA) and Baker (JMB) as the hapless Bealystock and Bloom led the company, demonstrating both remarkable technical refinement and effortless stage chemistry. The chit queue from the boys, which could have filled the auditorium twice over was testament to the impact of this wonderful production.

We then moved from the music of unrestrained celebration to the dark interior rhythms of *The Pillowman*. Here, guided with restraint and chilling simplicity by Rowan Hamilton (PAH), a gifted cast brought Martin McDonagh's harrowing tale of child murder to a packed and rapt audience in the empty space for the Michaelmas independent.

We returned to the scene of battle again in the Farrer show, *Regeneration*, an adaptation of Pat Barker's acclaimed WW1 novel, for the WING house play. The psychological damage and hidden after-effects of the conflict were explored with honesty and real tenderness on an evocative set built from a lattice-work of trench boards. Directed with great sensitivity by Peter Broad, assisted by DAM and CEB, the narrative had at its heart performances of great nuance and thoughtfulness from Bashaarat and Reid as the troubled Doctor and his patient.

Following the perennial exam showing of GCSE drama students in the Empty Space, audiences found their way across Common Lane to the NPTL dining room, where NCH carried off another expert handling of a disturbing, dystopian drama with his production of *Flesh* by Rob Drummond. Here, with echoes of *Lord of the Flies*, the actors were split into two tribes, where the action followed to a relentless (and cannibalistic) conclusion. The audience was bounced from moments of high comedy to deep distress, almost in the same breath.

Finally, as the December chill began to bite, RZRG managed (somehow) to bring all fifty members of HTWA house together onstage in a remarkable version of Dicken's *Christmas Carol*. With live carol singers, a stilt-walking spirit of Christmas-future and an interactive snowstorm, the production successfully harnessed the creative spirit of this talented house. Fresh, or rather seemingly fresh, from his huge success as Max in the school play, Harvey Allchurch brought out both pathos and delight as his Scrooge found the hope to live again.

After a dazzling display of technical prowess by the new keepers in the F block demonstration, the Lent half drama schedule blazed into life with KMA's bravura production of 'The Taming of the Shrew' in the Caccia studio for JRBS with Mee and Owen outstanding as the battling lovers.

Both nuance and physical intensity followed in the Independent double bill of *My Child* and *Pink Mist* (directed by Newberry AMM and Baker JMOB respectively). Both acting companies excelled, centred around performances of real stature from Simpson MAG and George SPH.

Following a ferocious and tender evening of excerpts from the A level drama students in the Empty Space the focus shifted to the Farrer as Matilde Marangoni's inventive design swept us into the 1930's with AMM's production of *The 39 Steps*. A sweeping and breathless narrative, executed with increasing dexterity by the cast and crew, followed the adventures of Lloyd Yorke's pitch perfect yet hapless Richard Hannay, directed by GV with both energy and wit.

Two days later the Caccia was transformed into a 1990's London restaurant for the JDN house play *Dealer's Choice* - the gifted ensemble, led by Betts and Gill, exploring the rhythm of cards and back room banter with precision and deep feeling.

The final production of the half was PEPW's revival of *Pressure*, set in a single room during the build-up to operation Overlord. Here an outrageously accomplished performance by Pope, as the Scottish meteorologist, within a swirling soundscape of shifting winds and aircraft, drew the audience deep into PB's beautifully modulated chamber piece. Minnie Cross, who joined the cast as Lt. Kay Summersby, adding her calm and vital presence to David Haig's play.

JMOB and JDN hosted excellent in-house productions, the former a production of *Variations* (directed by NCH) and the latter with *Kill Bob* (written by the producer), both of which showcased acting and technical work that would have graced far larger theatre spaces.

Sadly, the house drama competition, GCSE scripted scene performances and the RDOC in-house production of *Zoo Story* were all postponed because of the current situation.

The two school productions planned for the summer - *Hamlet* and *Peter Pan*, were unable to go ahead due to the pandemic. The students, however, found a host of other ingenious ways to explore the dramatic arts: boys in the costume and make up department learned new ways to upscale their fashion garments, and developed designs for the Elsinore visiting players guided by the head of wardrobe Faye Jary.

Lighting and sound technicians practiced different skills with a series of remote workshops led by the keepers, and actors from all blocks submitted monologues for the Coleridge cup, the curricular drama and the virtual Shakespeare prize.

A group of emerging playwrights meet each week to look at different ways to approach texts with DAG and RSH and are now setting off into the summer to write their first full drafts.

In film there was a cinema appreciation course run by our film maker-in-residence as well as the One Minute Film Festival, which received an array of accomplished and creative submissions. Cusworth's (JDN) winning entry in the best editing category underscoring his election to Keeper of Film in Michaelmas.

For the Lower Boy Play, our wonderful outgoing director in residence Grace Vaughan (GV) led forty lost boys into a more virtual landscape: 'Impending Zoom'. Made from improvised dialogue, Snapchat snippets, and storylines shaped by GV and Worth (Coll), this was collaboration and experimentation at its best, where the boys composed, rehearsed, performed and then edited over 24 hours of video content to make a wholly original drama hybrid.

The Hamlet company kept in trim with various activities - zoom rehearsals, character sculptures and the fourth of June's 'Hamlet's thoughts from lockdown' - and are now gearing up to film scenes from the play on the set at the end of September. This will make the Farrer one of the first

theatres in the country to be staging work – albeit in a novel and unforeseen way. It has been a long wait for the ensemble but - “if it be not now, yet it will come ...”