

NORTH ESSEX THEATRE GUILD 2012-13

GROUP- WRITTLE CARDS

PRODUCTION-ON GOLDEN POND by Ernest Thompson

DATE- 16th February 2013

INTRODUCTION- Having found my way to the village hall and met with fellow adjudicator, Liz Mullen, we were welcomed with efficiency and ready smiles. Seats were reserved for us to get a good view of the set and how it was arranged on the rather small stage. The atmosphere in the hall was warm and friendly. A simple but clear black and white programme was to be found on our seats and provided information from the director regarding the actors. A list of the crew demonstrated, as always, how many unseen participants there are in preparing a production.

THE SET-The backdrop of the "pond" and the scenery around it was certainly eye catching. The furnishings of this Maine summer home were well positioned on this small stage, to create a sense of the style and age of the place as well as indicating something of the characters who stay here. Windows were well placed to assist with lighting and allowing the view to be seen easily. The screen door did at times get stuck, presumably because of the limitation of space at the back but hinges clearly showed it was broken. The suggestion of a floor above was imaginatively conveyed upstage left. The overall impression was of a comfortable, somewhat shabby, much loved summer home.

PROPS- These appeared to have been chosen with careful consideration of place as well as family and managed well to reflect the interests of the characters. Items of furniture looked well used and utilitarian yet homely. The table was somewhat obscured but along with other pieces, certainly helped to give the impression that the occupants of this place were not interested in style and were rather untidy. The hearth was certainly the centre of this home- the fireplace and the objects as the brass wood basket, books, doll and fishing tackle along with crockery etc. certainly gave a good visual impression of the setting of the action. There were many personal props which were well handled although the storage boxes used in Act 2 were an exception as they were not carried as though they were packed with things. It might have been better to have placed the fishing net horizontally across a piece of furniture to avoid blocking faces. The organisation of these many items was well achieved by those responsible.

LIGHTING/SOUND- The lighting over the pond at the beginning appeared to flicker presumably this was a technical problem. The twinkling lights as evening drew in were most effective and we wondered if there was any reason why the summer's daytime could not have shown a golden glow over water- was it perhaps lack of space for lights? The lighting in the room was reflective of the time of year and created good atmosphere. The music choice was excellent and its poignancy reflected the mood of the play. Liz commented on that of Jim Croce giving way to some mellow Gordon Lightfoot being very apt. The sound effects were good although it might have helped the atmosphere to have, occasionally, heard the loons prior to any reference to them especially as they were rather late coming in at this point. Boat engine and horn, phone rings and car were well timed. It appeared that the operator's voice came from the opposite side of the stage from the ring tone, a recorded voice may have seemed more believable. The lighting and sound certainly supported the theme of the play suitably.

COSTUME/MAKE-UP - As would be expected in such a setting in the summertime in a place like Golden Pond dress for those living here and nearby was casual and easy in style. Norman obviously had a penchant for hats especially fishing hats and the costume department demonstrated this. Jeans, check shirts and jackets assisted in creating the ease and warmth of the Thayers and Charlie. Appropriately Bill and Chelsea wore more formal attire for Norman's birthday, indeed Bill's attire helped to establish his more formal personality. Jan Irving reflected the personalities in arranging the costume.

Make up has to be used sparingly especially when audiences are quite close to actors, it should not be obvious unless for a specific purpose as in something like a pantomime. Unfortunately we were aware of lines particularly on Chris Rogerson. It helps if checks are made under stage lighting.

PERFORMANCES -

Norman Thayer- Boot Banes managed to show , as soon as he came on stage , that he was in familiar surroundings- his summer home.

He is a man of varying moods and his reactions and dialogue reflected this consistently. Lines were delivered with confidence and in a good New England accent which never wavered. Dialogue was believable, often witty and sharp. Boot clearly defined his closeness to his wife and frustration at the way he and his daughter communicated with little in common. Movement was skilfully managed and whilst his collapse was well executed he did not show the heaviness of the box he had tried to lift. This was a believable performance.

Ethel Thayer - This was a character portrayed with a warmth . Cues could have, at times , been picked up more quickly to maintain pace however business was carried out naturally and Clare Williams nicely contrasted the character of her husband moving about the set with a believable familiarity and showing her anxiety as mother and wife. Again accent was well maintained.

Charlie Martin- With cheerful expression and a contagious laugh , which it might have been good to hear repeated in the second act, Chris Rogerson made a promising debut. Not the brightest of characters but friendly and easygoing Charlie obviously was interested in Chelsea and Chris made this apparent from his facial expression when she was mentioned and when he met her.

Chelsea Thayer Wayne- This character is complicated in that she was not the son her father had wanted and hence her relationship with him has never been easy. Add to this the fact that her marriage had not worked out meant there was insecurity As she comments about Bill-"----I may have been deserted" .Jodee Goodwin played the part with good facial expression and sustained her interpretation well; with experience there might have been greater subtlety in responding to her father but overall this was a good first time performance.

Billy Ray Jnr. - Toby Harris looked and showed the characteristics of an awkward teenage boy in an unfamiliar setting. He responded particularly well to Norman and showed the character's sense of humour. The telephone call was touching. Toby appeared to allow his eyes to wander to the audience without apparent reason at times, which he should avoid. This was a good debut performance, however.

Bill Ray - Chris Ivermee gave this character a quiet strength. Very different in appearance, dressed in a smart suit, as Bill, he appeared rather uncomfortable in this rural setting and with Chelsea's parents. This was well portrayed. After his initial embarrassment ,when talking to Norman , he became more self assured but did not perhaps, in his long speech ,show sufficient irritation .

DIRECTION - There was obviously good communication between the actors . With a well furnished set , props were easily handled although the packing boxes needed to show their weight when filled and lifted. The restricted stage area was organised to allow an illusion of space and light successfully. Pace was good and considering the lack of experience of some of the actors responses and reactions clearly displayed. Music and sound enhanced the mood in this production, however the telephonist at the beginning, should have been speaking from the same side of the stage as the telephone was positioned. Perhaps consideration should have been given to the dialogue where there were anomalies regarding such as reference to Billy as "little" and "midget". It could have been used sarcastically or been adapted. Stage management was efficient and quiet. Nick Caton mentions the challenges of directing. He achieved the charm and gentleness of this play and certainly sent us away in , as Liz said, a relaxed, feel good mood. Thank you

Adjudicator- Kate Sheffield

Assisted by- Liz Mullen