



Society : New Stagers  
Production : The Heiress  
Date : 25<sup>th</sup> July 2014  
Venue : St Anne's Church Hall  
Report by : Tony Sweeney

## Report

### General

The group continues to perform strong and thought provoking drama to a high standard. They are blessed with a fantastic array of acting talent that is able to turn its hand to a range of dramatic genres to give their plays real polish and this was no exception.

This was a retelling of a novel by Henry James and had all the feel not only of the period, but the social niceties and foibles that are so characteristic of his work.

I did fear that by reversing the normal orientation of the hall that some latecomers would come in through the set. Indeed one lady managed it just before the play started, but this was then remedied.

### Players

All the players were well suited to their roles, which is always a plus. The range and diversity of characters on display all worked well together to give the play a well balanced feel.

Joanna Dodd (Catherine Sloper) gave another breathtaking performance as the timid heiress who clearly failed to understand the wider world and falls for the dubious charms of an obvious gold digger. The character had a strange isolated feel about her which was essential to the story. The range of emotions and the personal growth she displayed throughout the unfolding of the plot were remarkable and convincing.

Dominic Alan-Smith (Morris Townsend) as the gold digging Morris was suitably smarmy throughout; indeed this helped the audience see through him from the start. Again this was a strong performance and strangely convincing. His interactions with the other characters showed a range of reactions which he exploited well.

David St Clare Nelson (Dr. Austin Sloper) as the father of the heiress was authoritative and strong, clearly seeing through the situation and torn between his love for his daughter and the need to protect her from her own shortcomings. This was a performance that clearly understood that conflict.

Orna Joseph (Lavinia Penniman) as the rather silly widow of a clergyman played the part well and portrayed the type of over-romantic notions such women of the time seemed to fall into. As this is a real departure for her, you have to acknowledge this as a fine piece of character acting.

Julia Coleman (Elizabeth Almond) as always gave an excellent performance in one of the smaller roles which helped define the wider social set-up that was the background for the play.

Laura Parsons (Marian Almond) again had a role which gave us an insight into the wider social context. She handled it well giving us a view of a more mainstream character of the time.

Amanda Clarke (Mrs. Montgomery) as the sister of Morris was comfortable in the part and handled her interview with Dr. Sloper well. It was quite a subtle sparing match and her contribution helped the plot develop.

Colin Sheehan (Arthur Townsend) again had a minor role and delivered it well.

Lucinda Lane (Maria) as the maid performed the character well, keeping to the social protocols of the day.

## **Director**

Pat Driver as director not only had a clear vision of what the play should be, but she also managed to mould her players into a convincing group of middle-class American professionals with both convincing accents and attitudes throughout. Her use of the space on stage was excellent and innovative, which I felt gave the play a much greater impact.

## **Stage Management**

Using the floor of the hall as the set meant that only one entrance and exit point was available. However this was used well as the entrance to a large room. All of the actors' exits and entrances were well worked out and delivered to give the play a real flow, as you would expect from a grand house during this period.

## **Sound**

A good clear sound delivered by some excellent vocal projections, which were audible to all, allowed the audience to really engage with the action.

## **Lighting**

The lighting was used well and denoted the numerous changes of scene. As the windows of the hall were beside the stage space there was a possibility of light pollution but this was not the case.

## **Make-up**

The make-up and hairstyles were in keeping with the period and worked well.

## **Set Design**

Having the action take place at ground level allowed for a much larger and complex set than is usual on the small stage in the hall. The use of period furniture, including a fire grate set, all helped reinforce the times. The set thus helped project the opulence and wealth at the centre of the play.

## **Props**

The props were again in period and used well. The cigars were particularly convincing even though they were obviously props. The doctor's bag and early stethoscope were again used well.

## **Costumes**

The costumes were fabulous – both in period and authentic looking, they gave the performers a platform to work from. I understand some were obtained from America especially for the show.

## **Programme**

The programme was a simple one and covered all the basics. I did feel it could have been more expansive on the play and its history. It is unfortunately not eligible for consideration for the regional awards.

## **Front of house**

Katie Bryan led the front of house team, dealing with everything that was thrown at her well. She welcomed everyone and dealt with all of the admin that arose. This is a group that clearly has a connection with its audience and the front of house is very much part of that.