



Society : New Stagers  
Production : Stepping Out  
Date : 1<sup>st</sup> May 2014  
Venue : St Anne's Church Hall  
Report by : Tony Sweeney

## Report

### General

This was a play slightly out of the style the group usually performs and this broadening of the repertoire was coped with extremely well giving us a truly entertaining evening. It's good to see people succeed when trying something a little different. The show itself was excellent, working on a number of levels and some strong characters were well depicted by some exceptional actors. This was supplemented by some amazing tap dancing, especially the closing number.

### Players

Some inspired casting allowed the group to bring strong and diverse characters to life; their interactions being the heart of the show and helped build the evening to the finale. The group's vocal projections were excellent with clear diction throughout. A variety of accents were used, perhaps emphasising the diversity of types being depicted and these were again maintained throughout.

**Sian Ashworth** (Lynne) gave a solid performance which helped underline the show's dynamic.

**Kate Bromage** (Andy), as a shy slightly awkward young woman, played the part well giving the character a believable and slightly sad, almost hollow feel. She had clearly worked hard to get into the character giving a measured portrayal throughout.

**Emma Burley** (Vera) played an older woman, who clearly had issues being socially insensitive and was obsessive about cleanliness and tidiness. This was a huge performance and she really threw herself into being a larger than life character. It was a character which made the rest of the cast seem normal and Emma clearly enjoyed the challenge.

**Julie Coleman** (Mrs. Fraser) gave a good performance as the group's grumpy northern accompanist, having an exasperated approach throughout which worked well and let the others spark off it.

**Cat Fox-Kirk** (Maxine) had an interesting role appearing outwardly confident and able to sort things, especially costumes and she revealed a more reflective side as the show progressed. Cat is an experienced performer and brought all this into play to give the character subtlety and impact.

**Vanessa Marchant** (Mavis) as the instructor was both the inspiration and the driver of the group. Her only dance was a secret solo which was well devised. Her strong and determined character, which was perfect for an instructor, gave the part credence.

**Laura Jane Parsons** (Sylvia) played a rather "tarty" woman with some clear issues around her situation and how she coped with it. Good mannerisms and body language reinforced the character making her credible in the role. Again, clearly a great deal of work and thought had gone into shaping the character.

**Sharika Sharma** (Rose) as the "token ethnic" (her words) did not overdo the stereotype which made her portrayal softer and more engaging than if this aspect were the driving force. A good stage presence and some amazing costumes all added to the effect.

**Mark Stannett** (Geoffrey) as the only male in the cast had an interesting role being not quite in the core group but nevertheless part of the social dynamics. His portrayal of the reserved and rather intimidated member of the troop worked well, giving both contrast and support in equal measure.

**Alisa Wight** (Dorothy) had an interesting role, being a little ditzy and clearly having a lack of self confidence. She did a lot of running around, again suggesting someone not fully in control of her environment which all added to the character.

### **Director**

In her directorial debut Stephanie Kendrick managed to deliver an exceptionally engaging and entertaining show. Her enthusiasm and vision was clear and this moulded the group to deliver a memorable show. Clearly this was the start of, I hope, many more directorial experiences.

### **Choreographers**

Stephanie Kendrick and Mark Stannett devised balanced and appropriate choreography. Indeed this was the heart of the show's impact given the setting. I particularly liked seeing the gradual progression from awkward and nervous practice to an excellent final number. It's often difficult to dance with any performance skills, never mind dancing less than perfectly on purpose when you have actually developed the talent – the group managed this exceptionally well.

### **Stage Management**

A small stage and all its limitations meant the management of the space both on and off stage needed to be well thought out. This was done well with people coming and going as they would for an evening class. This was further complicated by a large number of costume changes to emphasise the passage of time, but it was all wrapped up in a slick and well practiced display of careful stage management. The final number did fill the frame of the stage almost to the edges meaning it was a little compact.

### **Sound**

The sound levels were clear and audible with taped music providing some atmospheric background nuances.

### **Lighting**

The lighting worked well and did a good job of creating the feel of both a church hall and the stage for the final dance.

### **Make-up**

The make-up was appropriate and well applied, adding visually to the characters being depicted. That meant Emma was able to portray someone far older than she is with confidence.

### **Set Design**

It was an interesting idea to have a set depicting a church hall in a church hall and it worked. Little touches like notices and signs all added to the authenticity. The simple back curtain of silver streamers working well for the final scene making it feel like every tap routine you've ever seen.

### **Props**

The props were in period and well used, never getting in the way and always working within the context of the show.

### **Costumes**

The costumes all served to help project the character of the part being played. The final scene with everyone in an identical stage costume worked extremely well – Christina and Marian Myers clearly worked this out perfectly in terms of both the design and delivery of the costumes.

### **Programme**

The programme was very basic and only gave us a brief insight into the show and the cast.

**Front of house**

The front of house were welcoming although the single programme seller was unaware of the NODA complimentary ticket but we overcame this. The group has a long tradition of being both efficient and of making people feel at ease which is perhaps part of the reason why so many local people return again and again.