

What the butler saw

Literature



We went to see a performance of 'What the Butler saw' performed by the Anglo American Theatre Group (AATG), a local theatre company in The Hague. The play was performed in a small, local theatre which has many productions performed all the time. The script was originally written for older audiences, it contained a lot of adult humour and was more suited for mature audiences. The audience, which went to see it when we went, was of all ages, the youngest people there were all about 15 or 16.

I think that the performance was very well acted out; the actors were familiar with their characters and the stage was well presented with relevant props. The script was originally written in English, therefore no changes had to be made to make it suitable for an English speaking audience. The stage was in a box shape, as shown in the diagram on the next page. The backdrop was a doctor's office with an examining table. There were three different doors used for entrances and exits into and out of the scene: one at the back, and one on each side. A small curtain also blocked off the examining table.

There were six main characters in the play, these included the doctor, the secretary, the wife, the bell boy, the psychiatrist, and the police man. The doctor was the main part in the play. He started all the commotion at the start when he lied to his wife about 'inspecting' his secretary. This caused confusion as his wife then went looking for his secretary elsewhere. The actor playing the part of the doctor was always very edgy and moved quickly throughout the play. His face always had a worried look on it once the commotion had started, although quickly changed when he was trying to cover something up.

He wasn't as old as the psychiatrist, which I think suited the role. Age is associated with wisdom, the actor playing the part of the doctor, with the way he acted throughout the play, clearly was not as wise and mature as the psychiatrist, who was older, therefore he suited the part he was playing, whereas the psychiatrist was older and acted more tranquil and tended not to get as worked up as the doctor did. The audience found the performance of the actor playing the part of the doctor to be very comical with the extent the play went to just because of the lies he told.

His voice was loud throughout the play and was very rushed to create a sense of panic, which also kept the audience on the edge of their seats. The actor playing the part of the secretary was quiet throughout the whole play and never seemed to mind the orders the doctor gave her, she accepted them as if they were a normal thing, although she didn't always seem very aware of what was going on around her. She had a constant shocked expression on her face, but it also showed that she was confused about the whole situation.

There was a scene in the play which was very well done; it involved the secretary having to take her clothes off to enable the doctor to examine her. She stepped up onto the examining table and closed the curtains around her. She then proceeded to take off her clothes, but instead stripped down to her underwear, which gave the appearance to the audience that she was naked when she looked over the top of the curtain and only her head, neck and shoulders were visible. The play was set in the 1950's in a doctor's clinic in Britain.

It had a very stereotypical backdrop with the colours used and the types of costumes the actors wore also. The wife and the secretary had costumes that related to the time it was set in by wearing unfitted dresses down to the knees. The wife, being more wealthy than the secretary, had worn a dress with more patterns, which, in those days, showed the wealth of a person. The doctor and the psychiatrist had lab coats on which made them stand out from the rest of the characters. The bell boy also had a very stereotypical costume on; he wore a buttoned suit with a gold and red brimmed, flat top hat.

The director had constructed different personalities for every character, which made the play more interesting. The psychiatrist was always diagnosing all the other characters with mental disorders, which happened to fit in with the comments they make throughout the play, in turn, it convinces all the other characters that that the doctor, in particular, was mentally unstable. The Police man always seemed to enter the scene at the wrong time, this created a sense of anxiety and kept the audience on the edge of their seats. The secretary was always very placid and didn't always realise what was going on.

There were not many props used in the play apart from props which were associated to the costumes the actors wore. The bookshelf was part of the set which was used to hide evidence in; The actor hid his secretaries shoes in the bookshelf to keep them from his wife so she wouldn't suspect anything. The examining table was used for the secretary when she was told to strip down to her underwear when the doctor was to examine her. The table was

used at the start when the doctor was attending to paperwork before the commotion started.

The set was very well constructed to suit the play with many entrances and exits to and from the stage including the doors at the side of the stage acting as the wings and the door at the back of the stage. There were no wings but the side walls of the doctor's clinic acted like the side of the stage. The whole space on the stage was used throughout the play, as the play had a lot of movement in it, a big stage was needed. The Examining table was a good idea, it blocked off people while the curtain was closed, but at the same time it was a different way of having the characters off stage, instead of them having to go through any doors.

The set was realistic, although the scenery painted in the window and outside the door at the back of the stage was a bit unrealistic, apart from that, the set resembled a doctors office quite well. The lighting was a soft yellow colour. It brightened the stage without adding to the mood of the performance. It didn't change to create any special effects, the effects were created by the actors, therefore showing how much talent they had. There were sound effects in the performance when the alarm was sounded along with the red light 'alarm' effect, which added to the suspense and excitement.

There was no use of music throughout the play, I found that the play didn't need music to create tension or commotion. The climax of the play was just before the end. Most of the actors were dressed up and pretending to be a person they weren't. The secretary was dressed up as the bellboy; the

bellboy was dressed up as a woman; the Psychiatrist was also dressed up as a woman and was drugged, therefore he is not aware of the situation around him. This was the most confusing point of the play, but also the point where the confusion is sorted out.

From then on situations keep on arising, there were twists in the play which were unexpected: The bell boy and the secretary turned out to be brother and sister, and their parents turned out to be the doctor and his wife. I could not predict this twist in the play. Over all I think the play was very humorous, the lengths that the doctor goes to to cover up the fact the he was 'inspecting' his secretary was hilarious, although a bit hard to believe. The audience was very amused through the entire performance and constantly wondering what kind of situation will arise next.

The actors often turned to the audience and gave them a puzzled look whenever the play got confusing, which is the equivalent to intrusive narration in novels when the author asks the reader a question, or makes a comment aimed directly at the reader. The most memorable moment in the play was at the very end when the remains of Winston Churchill were pulled out of a box, this grabbed hold of the audiences attention because of the body part revealed. The whole of the stage was used in the performance, the characters moved around a lot, often very quickly to create the rushed sense in all the commotion.

The whole play was very busy and physical and was a change to the other dramatic plays of today. The play, although it was well thought up, tended to get a bit monotonous. The changing of clothes to change the characters

soon became very confusing and I found I lost interest half way through because I either couldn't follow the play, or I thought that the character changes went a bit too far. The acting was very good taking into consideration that the actors are not paid, but they pay the company to join the play, this shows that they are very committed to acting and take their acting seriously.