

With a set that had more than just a hint of the seaside postcard about it I wanted the music that greeted me prior to the opening of the play to reflect this. Instead I was greeted with Ella Fitzgerald singing "Summertime". This has an ideal title for a play set at the seaside in the height of Summer but in flavour is not even remotely seaside postcardish. No complaints about the vocal as such. I like millions of others am a great fan of Miss Fitzgerald. The three expertly created beach huts formed an excellent backdrop to the action. In front of them we had continually changing set decorations that were every bit as good as the huts themselves. The backcloth behind the huts was lit with great efficiency by the lighting team. Unfortunately their work in that direction only served to emphasise the fact that the cloth itself needed to be stretched at both extremities. Variations in lighting intensity were first class. There was a lovely hot sticky feeling when they were depicting that sort of day and at the opposite end of ~~the~~ scheme when the set as it were was in repose prior to the opening of the play or during the interval once again there was just a nice intensity of light on it so that we could see what it consisted of without it in itself being intrusive.

One of the strengths of the set dressing and props was the way in which they fitted the characters to whom they belonged. William and Margaret's table and chairs and the bits and pieces placed upon the table reflected their social position and outlook in life. William's first costume helped to fit him perfectly into this picture. The combination of the shorts and long socks was ideal. Similarly with our first glimpse of Margaret in hat, cardigan, plainish dress with the right sort of white shoes to round off the outfit. When Mrs Penfold arrived she too was turned out in the clothes that fitted the character immaculately. Those multi-coloured shorts below a grey/blue top plus the ponytail hairstyle all helped to create this somewhat belligerent character. That baseball cap worn by Stan whilst going very well with the rest of the outfit, tee shirt, shorts and ankle socks and canvas shoes, was not strictly correct if we assume that the action of the play is set at the time in which it was first written. There is no indication on the programme as to what period the play is being performed in and I suppose in that respect we should assume that it is being played in present day but if you look closely at the action and at the characters as such really they don't belong to the present day, they do belong to a slightly earlier era. Baseball caps, of course, have now become an almost obligatory part of the male wardrobe especially in the summertime but few of them would have been seen if you go back just perhaps five years or so.

Bernice was suitably attired in clothes somewhat more flashier than Margaret's. They were obviously not cheap but the combination and colours did not always sit comfortably together. No complaints about this, this is exactly the type of woman that we are talking about. You couldn't perhaps describe her as Oscar Wilde did about some people of someone that knew the price of everything and the value of nothing but at the same time Bernice is not the sort that goes in for subdued combinations. That was a lovely sun hat incidentally that topped off Bernice's costume.

The assortment of bags which arrived with Pauline was lovely. Mother's hat was another well chosen item as was the polka dot dress and those sensible shoes. Stan and Bernice's 'film director canvas chairs' had just the right superiority to those of William and Margaret helping to emphasise their slight monetary superiority over their neighbours. A lovely collection of mower, boat, ring, paddles etc arrived with Doug, Debbie and Becky. The manner in which they literally dumped these down in front of not only their beach hut but taking up space on both the beach huts either side of them just about summed up their laise faire attitude towards life. Without being belligerent as we would see in other members of the cast when they arrived this group invaded William and Margaret's and Stan and Bernice's space almost without thought which, of course, rather put the neighbour's backs up towards the three young newcomers.

The windbreak was a first class piece of stage dressing and ably used for good effect by the Director and all concerned.

The sound team's work in this scene was also shown to be of a high standard. It is easy enough to get seashore sounds but to bring them in just at the right volume and to maintain them as long as they are required and then ease them away again is not the simplest of factors and this was an excellent balance between the dialogue and the sounds that were there in the background.

The changes of costume that we saw from the two couples, William and Margaret and Stan and Bernice, at this time once again fitted admirably into their characters. Margaret now in her white flared trousers and a suitable top to go with it. We can discuss Bernice's costume later when we come under individual characters because, of course, here we have part of it being an integral part of the dialogue between herself and Ida. The contrast between Mrs Newman and Mrs Penfold, the one rather flamboyant and the other a little colourless as would suit a lady whose mind wouldn't really be particularly upon turning herself out in any smart manner was ideal. Nice to find that both of these ladies and Ida were equipped with appropriate shoes to go with the time, the place and the person. Sitting as they were in front of that wind break the wrong choice of shoes would really have to use a somewhat mixed metaphor have stood out like a sore thumb.

This first scene in Act Two ended with a delightful picture as the beach hut dwellers turned the tables on the three ladies who had pitched their wind break in front of what they considered to be their property. The scene itself, however, was rather slow in building up and it, therefore, lost a little of its effect. Nothing slow, however, about the work of the stage crew who fairly scampered across to clear that set and get us underway to Scene 2 Act Two in the briefest possible time.

It was Margaret again who underlined what we thought had gone into the respective costumes when she appeared in this scene once again in an outfit which was ideally in keeping with her character. William too, who had changed everything but his hat, again had made sure that his costume was absolutely in keeping with the character that he had been building so carefully throughout the evening. The somewhat skimpy clothes that Debs and Becky appeared in would have I suspect have had the exact effect they were seeking upon any young man that happened to go by at that moment. Doug when he reverted to trousers with that grey top had just smartened himself up that little bit as young men tend to when they have an eye on a particular young lady.

Also nice were the dark green folding chairs which belonged to Doug, I suspect from the look of them having come from the National Trust. A good lighting effect in Scene 3 in Act Two where we had the impression that rain was about and it was no longer a bright over warm sunny day. Debs and Becky picked up this feeling for us by wearing coats, which gave us the impression indeed that the temperature had dropped considerably.

As you expect from an author who had had such success writing sitcoms on television there was a great deal of very good dialogue on hand, which in the vast majority of cases was well handled by the cast. Where the play was less successful was in building up a story line that would run through three Acts and not keep falling back virtually on the sort of ending that one would expect to find at the end of each episode of a situation comedy on television. Because of this the production needed very careful pacing to add the light and shade and variations in pace that were really not there to any great extent within the writing. This was

not always the case as I have already described at the end of Scene 1 in Act Two where the build-up was not quick enough to really send the action along at a fast enough pace. However, taken overall the majority of the cases where we tended to have too long periods which were on one level were more the responsibility of the author than they were either of the Director or the cast. This is not an uproarious, riotous comedy or one of which is full of farcical business and it was good to see that the Director and cast had accepted it for what it was and set out to garner as many laughs as they could without forcing situation or sending characters over the top. As a result the characters were always real people and able to hold our interest and sympathy. In return they provided us with an evening of gentle humorous entertainment.