

**GREATER MANCHESTER DRAMA FEDERATION
3 ACT PLAY FESTIVAL 2018/19**

Society	CHADS THEATRE COMPANY
Title	GHOSTS
Author	HENRIK IBSEN (adapted by MIKE BROWN)
Date & Time	Tuesday 30/10/18 7.45pm
Venue	Chads Theatre, Cheadle Hulme
Contact/host name	Hamish Lawson
Contact on the night	
Young actors in cast?	No
Licence available	Yes

Production highlights: Wonderful use of lights and sound
Good ensemble playing.

To think about for the future: Just the briefest moment of masking of Helene during one scene but this is a very minor quibble. Also, the age difference between Oswald and Helene did not look right (if it was, apologies!)

THE PRODUCTION

Ibsen's classic play delivers the message that we are all haunted by duty and public opinion, particularly where family are concerned. This is a play with a serious message, a cold setting and a bleak ending for the Alving family but there are also certain scenes of warmth and lines that offer up a rather dark sense of humour. It's an intriguing play and one with worthwhile ideas to mull over. I often wonder how adequately we can recreate these old classics. Can we do them well? Will the messages still be strong or might they now seem overly simple though still relevant? It is fitting that I am back at CHADS again when I return to these questions as I have had something of a thematic journey with you as far as the questions are concerned. Two years ago I saw your production of another Ibsen piece, 'A Doll's House' and considered that "such a project could be more satisfying for the company than for the audience. Tackling something like 'A Doll's House' requires actors who can not only cope with wordy scripts written in a more grammatically complex way, but also requires them to sustain a mood and tone." On that occasion I felt that the play was well directed but needed stronger playing in some areas. I also felt that the messages contained within it ought to have been obvious to a socially conscious modern audience and therefore lacked enough meat in a modern production. I then watched 'The Rivals', adapted and directed (as is tonight's show) by Mike Brown. My response? "I don't really think that I could expect more from such a period piece. Great work from you all and proof that the age of a piece should never bar it from new presentations." My only reservations on that occasion were regarding the length of the production, although it was well adapted. And so here we are again. Back to Ibsen (and the

director of 'A Doll's House' is here in the cast alongside the adaptor/director of 'The Rivals'. I wonder if the more light-hearted nature of 'The Rivals' was what partly carried it? Can 'Ghosts' have the same impact? One thing is for sure, there are a small handful of societies within the large community of the GMDF that I approach with great confidence regarding old classics revived - the others shall, of course, remain nameless here but CHADS is definitely one of them. I note a selection of names both on and off stage that I consider to be extremely encouraging. I look forward to this show with some trepidation but with overall confident anticipation...

TECHNICAL

<p>Set and props <i>A set which shows creativity and innovation and addresses the style of the production. Is well constructed.</i> <i>Props which are in period, authentic in appearance and placed strategically e.g. furniture.</i></p>	<p>Here was the usually fine use of your lovely, sizable stage. A box set with plain, pale walls, two carpets, a round dining table and chairs placed CSR, two doorways off SR and a framed portrait in that area on the back wall. CS and CSL were three white garden chairs and another couple of varied tables. The back wall offered us an external door and three large windows that allowed us a lovely view of conifers and the sky beyond them. There was also a sensibly placed hat stand. The whole acting area boasted a classy look and feel to it, one that felt just right for nineteenth century Norway. Beautifully, presented (even more so in conjunction with the lighting) it managed to communicate a certain amount of comfort and wealth whilst remaining cold and bleak, suiting the locale and many of the themes.</p>
<p>Lighting and Sound <i>Lighting and sound effects which contribute towards the dramatic potential, etc.</i></p>	<p>The lighting for this production felt as much an essential part of the cast as in any play that I can remember seeing. Whilst it was ideal for an interior, it was spectacularly successful in presenting the cold, bleak, wintry atmosphere outside. I also loved the gradual darkening that resulted in an almost magical, deep purple as night-time fell, the orange lights to suggest a raging fire (especially striking during the blackout) and the patient raising of the lights to convey the passage of time, with the use of a lamp USL to add to the effect. Here we saw a truthful picture, just what might have occurred in a household awake beyond normally expected hours, using interior lights until the daylight become strong enough to dispense with them. Even the daylight retained that dismal, subdued effect though, entirely suited to the mood of the scene. The sound also played its part well, the opening classical music was stirring, at just the right volume and was well cued. The sound of the fire was very good, even if it seemed to begin rather abruptly, and the screams heard off were convincingly used, likewise the sound of a foghorn. Nice work.</p>
<p>Costumes <i>Costumes which are in of the period, well fitting, colour co-ordinated and enhance characterisation.</i></p>	<p>All of the costumes were, as I have come to expect at CHADS, absolutely perfect. Regina's maid's uniform of long, grey dress and white apron, Jacob's work jacket, open necked shirt, workman's apron, rough trousers and boots, the black and white of the pastor, the strikingly ornate red and cream dress of Helene and the red velvet smoking jacket of Oswald all helped to immediately create a sense of character and place.</p>
<p>Makeup and hair <i>Make hair and wigs which are in period and appropriate to the production (including size of venue) and assist in developing the character.</i></p>	<p>A couple of years ago I had reservations about the ladies' wigs in 'A Doll's House'. No problems here as the actresses' own hair was just fine. Regina's scraped back and tied, Helene's looking appropriately fine yet slightly austere in a bun. Oswald sported a good beard and hid his hair was carefully combed whilst Jacob and the Pastor were more au naturel – for Jacob a sign of the honest working man, for Pastor Manders an indication of a mind intent on loftier things (though still presentable, of course!) The fire smudged make-up of a dishevelled Oswald was also nicely done.</p>

DIRECTION

Detailed study/knowledge and interpretation of the text; progressing the author's

intent with creativity and sensitivity.

Using theatrical dynamics to communicate with the audience.

Appropriate delivery of the text using timing and rhythm.

Settings with regard to focus, pace and groupings.

Movement which is appropriate to the period and style of production.

Creating atmosphere and mood to develop the full dramatic impact.

DIRECTOR – MIKE BROWN

Well done, Mike. Your adaptation of the original text retained all of its messages and tone whilst the length of the production was substantial enough whilst fitting comfortably into an agreeable running time – 40 minutes for the first act was absolutely spot on. All of the characters were clearly outlined, the dialogue remained authentic and the interaction smooth. You had a decent stage area to play with but that by no means that a play can block itself – you ensured that moves were logical and slick, covering all areas of the stage and providing a variety of good pictures, for example having the Pastor sat CSL at the dining table as Helene opined CS, drawing the attention. There was a brief moment of unfortunate masking when Jacob entered, wanting to speak to the Pastor and stood CS. Helene was completely obscured. She moved clear after a few seconds (signs of awareness from the director when planning, the actor thinking on her feet or both at once?) The characters were well brought to life and managed a multitude of emotions and interactions. All of them showed impressive chemistry although I did think that Osvald looked a bit too old to be Helene's son. Apologies if I'm wrong in saying that but, even then, it's the look of the thing that counts. Still, the tragic denouement was beautifully presented, acting sound from both mother and son, and you guided them well, ensuring there was no plummet into OTT melodrama whilst still wringing out every last drop of drama and emotion.

I felt that the depiction of the fire was superb and I must compliment you on so successfully bringing together performance, lighting and sound to such great effect. You dared to have some lengthy pauses as we were bombarded by sensory messages about the fire and it worked brilliantly. This was a great success, managing all of the necessary messages and tone of the play but ensuring that it was engaging for a modern audience. Good work.

ACTORS

Characterisation which is believable shows flair, originality and understanding.

Vocal technique which is appropriate to the play and is delivered with understanding and a good technique.

Movement which is in character and in period and incorporating movement to deliver pace.

Supporting ones fellow actor unselfishly and enhancing his performance.

Using all available theatrical skills to make a noticeable contribution to the play.

(Include individual adjudications for each actor.)

REGINA ENGSTRAND – MELANIE BESWICK

Looking perfect in a long grey dress and apron, and with hair pulled back and tied, you gave us a good, often bold and spiky performance, Melanie. You were appropriately subservient when appropriate but also showed us that Regina's situation in the household had given her a touch more confidence and haughtiness than her position might usually create. You had a good, confident stance and conveyed annoyance perfectly by crossing your arms firmly. You made use of a good voice – lines clearly delivered and a wide range of facial expressions. Your relationship with Jacob was natural and believable. You were almost condescending at times, though your haughtiness cleverly broke and allowed your roots to show on occasion. I enjoyed the comic moment when you blithely spoke to the Pastor of your figure filling out – well done. The coquettish behaviour with Osvald was also nicely played, giving way to a touch of nervousness later on, and your final raging despair at the truth of your ancestry provided a final emotive scene to complete an impressive range of feelings that you communicated well.

JACOB ENGSTRAND – NIGEL WESTBROOK

This was nicely done, Nigel, a good, colloquial accent and delivery. You looked every inch the working class man in work jacket, apron and boots. You had a convincing and well-sustained limp. Ever the common man, you were demonstrative but never overly harsh, was quite touching in trying to connect with your daughter but being pushed condescendingly away (a convincing relationship that really did speak of husband/daughter). I liked how you clutched your cap in front of you and bowed slightly when you talked – an almost unconscious subservience, inbred from youth. Still, you cleverly balanced the elements of Jacob's character so that it was no surprise to see you be more conniving at times, whilst you could still elicit sympathy via the conveyance of your earnestness and humble attitude. Very enjoyable.

PASTOR MANDERS – HAMISH LAWSON

Hamish, you had an imposing figure and well used your lovely, rich voice. You used a great range of gestures so that – already looking striking in the Pastor's clothing – you really stood out. You used a very natural conversational style but your posture and positioning always seemed to be commanding and one could understand how this character was able to impress everybody most of the time, making appearances count for so much. It was a joy to watch you go about your business – one move involving you circling the dining table and picking up a book. A simple move in itself but you drew the attention so well. I also enjoyed the way you communicated the other side of the Pastor, that desperate need to be seen to do the proper thing. This was well presented in your comic embarrassment at Regina's reference to her fuller figure and also in the tangible sadness hovering over you and Helene, who could possibly have been happy together in another life. A strong performance.

HELENE ALVING – KATHRYN WAY

Kathryn, you were most striking in your beautiful dress and era-appropriate hairstyle. You initially came across as confident and I could well imagine Helene controlling the life of herself and those around her just as you, the actor, comfortably controlled the stage in your scenes. You had a great handle on the language and the delivery perfectly suited the late 1800s. Quite a few of your lines with the Pastor had a lace of dark comedy which were played well alongside the drama. The audience took it all very seriously however and were thoroughly engaged in the tragic turn of events. You developed a believable relationship with your son despite the ages not looking right, and well handled the falling apart of this family situation. Gradually, you gave into despair but never overplayed it. There was also very nicely judged emotion when you revealed your late husband's misdemeanours and convinced us of your fears for Osvald too. The final scenes were hard-hitting and expertly played. Great work.

OSVALD ALVING – ANDREW KIRBY

Andrew, you looked absolutely splendid in your red velvet jacket, with a trim beard, proffering a pipe. Perhaps this olde worlde look added years to you in a way that didn't quite chime with Helene's really quite youthful appearance? Still, I have to say that you made the relationship work very well and you came across as likeable despite having a lot of moans and groans to perform, as well as a touch of maid bothering. You were well spoken, brooding and made

impressive use of solid silences. The great, firm, unmoving stance at times was really quite formidable. Your recollections of childhood then really became quite light whilst your deep voice when quoting your late father added pleasing texture. Your performance here was pleasantly youthful in a way that belied the beard and pipe. Your firm voiced, angry protests against the Pastor's old-fashioned piety added yet more variety to the delivery and your gradually built up stress (and descent into fatal illness) was patiently done and most effective. The reveal of the illness was really well done. Your final, dishevelled appearance following the after effects of the fire was great and your performance really sold your weariness and despair. Well done.

OVERALL ACHIEVEMENT (or CONCLUSION)

An excellent understanding of the author's intent. Direction which shows skill, originality, sensitivity and creativity using all the theatrical tools of pace, focus, delivery, timing and rhythm.

Talented actors creating highly effective dramatic impact.

Evidence of teamwork and unselfish ensemble playing.

Actors who interact and react and a production team who use all resources to create atmosphere and mood.

Yet again, CHADS is a place that shows just how to present a period piece. The fact that it was adapted and directed by one and the same person was very impressive but, as usual, the performances of the actors and technical crew also bowled me over. Once again, thanks for the warm welcome and the well delivered entertainment.

Adjudicator (print)	IAN TAYLOR
Adjudicator (sign)	
Date	Tuesday 30/10/18