

Time for dinner

Dinner Party

★★★★

**The Barn, Southwick,
Wednesday, September 11**

HAVING watched Moira Buffini's black comedy, I will be declining dinner party invitations for a while.

This dinner party from hell has the hostess taking great pains to ensure success – the pains being inflicted upon her guests.

Imagine a Gothic *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*

Think *Abigail's Party* set among an intellectual, upper class background with the humiliation and verbal sniping racked up.

This study of a disintegrated marriage and revenge was tough to digest but plenty of humour helped make it palatable.

As Paige the hostess Jacqueline Harper gave a fine performance of a woman driven by despair to such bizarre revenge.

Her ice cold demeanour allowed for some withering, bitchy one-liners.

Philip Keane brought out the weakness of Lars, her husband – dishing out philosophical advice to others but unable to help himself.

His lover Wynne was nicely played by Jenny Burtenshaw.

Her performance produced many of the play's laughs.

Completing the invited guests were Lars' old friend Hal and his new wife, Sian. Adam MacRae and Louise Yeo brought out the underlying brittleness and fragility of their relationship.

There was one uninvited guest whose presence stirred up a few prejudices. Neil Turk played Mike with a good sense of comic timing.

H. Reeves, as the silent hired waiter, delivered an air of sinister menace throughout.

His looks spoke volumes.

Harry Atkinson's direction, particularly the careful staging of the seated scenes, ensured a good production of a flawed play that was overlong, too verbose and sagged in the second act.

Barrie Jerram