

Noda South-East

The irony of the title 'The Man Who Came to Dinner' was not lost on me when I picked up the email asking if I could attend and cover the show in place of my NODA colleague as I had just sat down to mine and had to leave before the first fork full. As a result and despite rushing straight to the Southwick Barn Theatre, I did miss the first eight minutes. However this was very kindly filled in for me, by director Kate Armes and publicity officer Gary Cook, in the interval and by that time I had been pretty accurate in my suspicion of how the play had been set up. Kate had done an excellent job of priming her talented cast of 19 players perfectly and had also cast them superbly. Each performer brought a unique and three dimensional character sparkling to life in the comedy penned by Moss Hart and George S. Kaufman.

The story follows the fortunes and misfortunes of the highly egocentric radio personality Sheridan Whiteside, played brilliantly and effortlessly by Bill Griffiths, who allegedly slips and breaks his hip while attending a dinner date with the Stanley family. Resultantly he and his personal assistant Maggie Cutler, perfected by Louise Yeo who delivered an outstandingly realistic performance, end up having to remain for ten days as house guests of the Stanley's. Far from the charming man they believed him to be previously, Whiteside turns out to be a very boorish and manipulative megalomaniac who spends his time carelessly meddling in the lives of the entire family and all who come into contact with the often abhorrent character. This sets up some hilarious situation comedies and allows the introduction of an extended supporting cast all of whom delivered with great aplomb.

However aside from the aforementioned leads there were two standout cameos for me. H Reeves was the delightfully camp and highly strung Beverley Carlton who was simply hilarious with divine timing and grace as he wafted in and out of the short scene he appeared in and lifted noticeably. However the confident and beautifully shallow character of Lorraine Sheldon was skilfully and wittily delivered by the talented Jacqueline Harper. Mention of these two should however not detract from first class strong performances by each and every other player in the company. Costumes by Milla Hills, Set designed by Martin Oakley and all technical aspects were all right on the money too putting the icing on the cake. Kate and producer Anita Jones should be rightly proud of their achievement.