

Players rise to the challenge of Pinter's claustrophobic masterpiece

IN the intimate surroundings of Guildford's Electric Theatre last week The Herald Players successfully took on the challenge of performing what is often said to be one of the greatest plays in modern theatrical history: Harold Pinter's *The Caretaker*.

The play follows the homeless Davies after he is given shelter by the mysterious Aston. However, the kindness of a stranger is not all it seems, when Davies, Aston and his manipulative brother Mick become embroiled in a power struggle in order to determine who is ultimately the caretaker.

Producing a play with the kind of reputation that *The Caretaker* has was not the only challenge the theatre group

faced, as more importance rests on the power of suggestion through movement and pause than speech and story.

Having said that, the actors showed skill, humour and sensitivity in dealing with the awkward pauses, unrelated tangents and uncomfortable small talk Pinter used to construct conversation between strangers.

Perhaps the biggest triumph for the Herald Players was the excellent characterisation each actor displayed, showing incredible thought for the characters they were portraying.

David Hemsley-Brown took on perhaps the most demanding role of the un-communicative Aston, who

takes Davies into his home. David played Aston with well-observed sensitivity, specifically where he describes his experiences as a young man taken into a mental health institution: a monologue which was both moving and sincere.

Aston's menacing brother Mick was played convincingly and with enthusiasm by Simon Hurst who seemed to enjoy the humour, albeit cruel and brutal, that his character subjected onto Davies.

Jonathan Jones's excellent and realistic performance gave the proud and lazy Davies surprisingly likeable and endearing qualities, again through even managing to achieve empathy with the audience after his somewhat

self-inflicted downfall.

The cluttered West London flat where all of the action takes place was translated into an impressive set, and it was an achievement in itself that the actors and the set all managed to fit onto the small stage. Combined with atmospheric lighting and a good use of music this worked in the Herald Players' favour, achieving the claustrophobic atmosphere necessary for Pinter's play.

All in all, *The Caretaker* was a well-cast and skilfully-directed piece of theatre that was enjoyable did justice to the excellence of Pinter's writing. It is reassuring that amateur drama of this high standard is still available locally.

Caroline Steer

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