Review: The Importance of Being Earnest

DramaSoc’s latest play starts the new term of performances with a bang. Charlotte Hutchinson reviews

Sunday 4 May 2014

Venue: Drama Barn

Rating: ★★★★★

If I had to summarise this production in one word it would be delightful. Absolutely delightful. Entering the drama barn, the dark and potentially sinister surroundings had been utterly transformed. The understated combination of fairy lights, painted flowers and even a garden swing perfectly set the tone for the hilarious frivolities which were to follow. In spite of the slight kerfuffle caused by confused audience members attempting to sit in places reserved for the actors, the split stage was a very effective tool for physically engaging the audience. Being a fervent fan of Oscar Wilde, I admit that I approached this production with excited trepidation. Such a demandingly fast-paced script is at risk of losing its potential if not performed to perfection. Within the first scene however, I realised my concerns were unfounded. A surprisingly musical opening showed from the offset that directors Millie Beach and Grace Lievesley would not be afraid to play with Wilde’s script; introducing moments of unexpected humour and pathos alike through their spontaneous musical interludes. The additions were particularly effective with regard to the servant roles. Played by Martha Pothen and Jamie Bowman, the house servants were given more depth of
character and received more raucous laughter from the audience than the original script would glean.

Though I could easily go into great detail praising the individual performances of every actor, the two that most resoundingly remain in my memory are Matthew Roberts’ Jack Worthing, and Joe Mackenzie’s Algernon Moncrieff. I mentioned previously that the script is demanding, and never more so than in the rapid exchanges between these two characters. None of Wilde’s wit was lost to stumbling lines or uncertain delivery as I had feared. The play’s sharpest witticisms were delivered with an admirable straight face and irony on every count; and this of course, was the case for every member of the cast.

I could not recommend this play highly enough. If it wasn’t for my pitiful student budget and need to buy food, I would, myself, be going to see it again tonight. This is categorically, not a production to be missed.