

# THE ROSE BOWL AWARDS

FOR AMATEUR  
DRAMA & MUSIC

Name of Society            Hanham Folk Centre Players

Name of Production      And Then There Were None

Date                         9 April 2005

Venue                        Hanham Folk Centre

Adjudicator                June Rayner

In 1939, Agatha Christie wrote the novel on which this play is based. The action takes place on an island off the coast of Devon, where ten people have been invited to spend a weekend. Before finding themselves mysteriously stranded, a recording is heard indicting each guest as a murderer. One by one, the guests are slain until just three of them remain to fight it out at the climax.

Interest chiefly lies in the ingenuity of the plot as this extraordinary murder mystery unfolds. Audiences, busily trying to work out which character is the murderer, must be taken by surprise again and again. Characters are from stock, simply drawn as types in two dimensions, they are chess-pieces which the author moves around her board.

The setting is interesting in that it is a room overlooking the sea incorporating a skyline. Set-dressings and costume are just pre-war.

## PRESENTATION

A very simple room was created with large glass doors and windows across the back with a railed balcony to the exterior. Three doors, one St R and two St.L led to different parts of the house. A fireplace was placed D.St.R over which there was a framed print of the rhyme at the centre of the plot and on the mantelpiece, ten small soldiers were ranged. Scenery was painted in a clean grey and white. The room had the look of an airy holiday location.

The room was pleasantly furnished with light cane sofa and chairs. There was a drinks table or trolley. Other properties were correctly and suitably supplied as asked.

## LIGHTING

Good, bright daylight illumined the opening scene gradually fading as the day wore on. Initially, distribution was good and the level of light was sufficient. But, as the

light faded and later the storm was created, the level of light became too low. Even more murky was the scene illumined by candles. Yes, the atmosphere was suitably brooding but very low levels of light must be balanced by sufficient illumination to see faces. Use your FOH more carefully. No actor should have to perform unlit however subdued the light. More light around the fireplace and centre stage was necessary. Cueing was good.

#### SOUND AND EFFECTS

The quiet introductory and incidental music had been chosen with discrimination. Boat sounds and sirens sounded authentic. Off-stage noises were prompt. The wind sounds came rather suddenly. Try to phase it in a little more subtly.

#### COSTUME

Costume was firmly based upon character and in this respect it was effective. There was only a hint of 1939 but it was almost sufficient to create a sense of period. Vera's costumes had a good thirties look about them as did Wargrave's double breasted suit.

#### MAKE UP

There was a gentle effort to create a period look about the heads, and faces were natural where make up was used.

#### STAGE MANAGEMENT

Was efficient. They were speedy. It was the costume changes that caused the delays between scenes.

#### PRODUCTION

Audiences attending a thriller, a whodunit, expect lots of clues and red herrings to litter the action and the dialogue. They become caught up and engaged in trying to guess who the killer is and they derive enormous satisfaction if they get there before the denouement. So the duty of the director is to find ways to point clues on the one hand while casting doubt upon every character in the play on the other. It is a very different game than directing an ordinary drama.

This was a good choice of play. It is full of action and, unlike many Agatha Christie stories, there are few long scenes of dialogue when a detective questions each character in turn. While characters are on the move, coming and going, and murder is heaped upon murder there is no danger of flatness.

The director *did* keep everyone on the move to a large extent, by this means covering the obvious clues and raising suspicion all over the place. This was especially effective around the mantelpiece with its soldiers. She managed to mask their disappearance from us. But she as good as gave the game away by constantly placing Wargrave at the focus of attention centre stage. His presence drew excessive attention more-or-less putting the idea in the audience's mind that he was the guilty party. Much better to keep him out of the picture as much as possible, giving him centre stage only when absolutely necessary

Beware of masking. This occurred several times, particularly when characters were around the drinks table.

The shape of this play is clear. It begins very quietly and naturally and, for this reason, there ought to have been a pause when the curtain rose. Just allow the audience to look and to settle before playing the opening pages leisurely – as you did. We were able to meet and begin to know each character upon their arrival. But the recording scene was greatly underplayed. It comes like a bolt of lightening. It shocks! The reactions were poor. Characters were not absolutely aghast, stunned and horrified as they ought to have been. Nor was there sufficient drama in the reactions to the first murder. Nor did the pace increase as it should in order to raise tension.

The scene where everyone was admitting, and, in some cases, confessing, past misdemeanours was good. Almost enough doubt was raised, almost enough red herrings were strewn. While you did the right thing in seating the General where he was not in the way of the action, that position was too close to us and he, as well as Mrs Rogers were forced to deliver their lines in an upstage direction. As more deaths followed and the tension rises it is important to reflect this in increasingly varied pace and in dramatic pause. Unsettle the audience much more as you approach the end of the act. Send out the audience uneasy.

Act II sc1 ended well because the director had been able to shape this scene much more purposefully. It is a good thing to bring characters who are in conflict face to face. Make them intrude into each other's space. It will send the right messages. Fear was again underplayed. Actors need to think about the messages their bodies are communicating. They must be encouraged to find ways to show us how fearful they have become. There was no real tension at the start of the final scene... and this with five bodies! The row between Lomard and Blore had impact. It raised the emotional temperature. Vera would not have remained seated, though. Her explanations needed a swift pace because you cannot afford to allow the tension to slacken.

The snatch of the gun was *terrible!* There was nothing dramatic or frightening about it. But the actual shooting was satisfactory.

#### ACTING

Great efforts had been made with clarity and projection with the result that important verbal clues were clearly heard. Diction was generally good.

There appeared to be a sound understanding of the nature of these characters and most were well-defined types in the Agathe Christie mould.

Actors should aim to be more physically expressive. The tensions and fears ought to affect their movements, gestures and facial expressions. Speaking the dialogue is only half of the actor's task. The other half is, of course, the acting of the character's emotions.

With most of the cast, lines were perfectly secure.