

Out of Order Review

Alex Wood | 21 Feb 2022 10:00am

Out of Order is a play written in 1990 by the master of the modern farce Ray Cooney. The play hasn't aged and many of its references are bang up to date – I especially enjoyed the audience reaction to the line that went something like 'Of course he can be trusted, he's an MP'.

Conservative minister Richard ('Call me Dickie') Willey has to stay in London for an overnight sitting of Parliament. Not a man to overlook an opportunity he has arranged to stay at the Westminster Hotel in order to manage a romantic liaison with Jane Worthington, the secretary to the Leader of the Opposition – an interesting situation in itself. With his wife safe at home in the belief that hubby is busy and with the happy assumption that he really won't be needed in the Commons the minister opens the curtains in Suite 648 only to discover what appears to be a dead man half way through the window.

Never man to take responsibility for what could turn out to be an embarrassing mess (sound familiar?) Richard Willey turns to his Parliamentary Private Secretary, George Pigden, to sort things out....

And that's just the start!

As Director Terry Gallager points out in his astute programme notes '...Farce is hard work.' That's true but also very rewarding work for cast and audience if it works as well as the show I saw.

I was so impressed by the two leads, Simon Hook (Willey) and Justin Clinch (Pigden).

Simon is great as the craven, scheming minister, his body language expressing his desperation perfectly. And Simon is ideal as Pigden, a man who clearly has ability; he is no-one's fool but his political future depends on his boss, the minister, with the result that he is bound to do his bidding.

Both 'on the go' (especially Justin in a high-energy role) throughout the show – wonderful work.

The slightly run-down Westminster Hotel has a slightly run-down staff, admirably headed by Heward Simpson as its Manager, slightly servile (I love the way he calls the minister Mr Willay – presumably to avoid any embarrassing confusion with the male member) but increasingly suspicious and impatient with the various shenanigans in Room 648 and its neighbourhood. And there is another crowd-pleasing performance from BCP regular Philip Fine as the waiter, with a wonderful variety of gestures and idiosyncrasies; never backward in coming forward when it comes to asking for tips.

And Maria the maid (Marylin Fairbairn), regularly popping in at just the wrong moment only to be sent away again. A lovely cameo.

Katy Roberts is just right as Jane Worthington, the minister's mistress...or is she just a bit on the side? Probably in above her head at the start of the play, things can only get worse as time goes on and her husband enters the fray. A good, controlled performance. Ronnie Worthington is Jane's angry husband – played well by Adrian McGlynn.

Two more surprise visitors are Pamela Willey (Deborah Watson), the minister's wife and Gladys (Imogen Tredwell), the nurse to George Pigden's mother, popping in to see what exactly is keeping him from coming home to her distressed patient. (By the time she arrives whether she is ever able to understand what is going on is a moot point.) Both making an impact and acquitting themselves very well.

Suchit Kulkarni is 'A body' and as such has to put up with a lot of rough manhandling until it's realised that he is, much to the alarm of Willey and Pigden, still alive. Being a dead weight followed by being a half-conscious man is a tough gig and Suchit passes the test with flying colours.

Finally, not mentioned in the cast list but given a curtain call of his/her own, The Window! (I'd have liked to see it bonk its victims square on the head but I can understand that safety dictated a compromise.)

Many thanks to Banbury Cross Players and their fast, furious and funny farce for a very entertaining night.