

**Noises Off,
Canterbury Repertory
Theatre, Reviewed by
Sonya Pegg**

It would be right to say that Noises Off was the most ridiculous play I have seen in a long time. Funnily enough, this is not a criticism. The Canterbury Repertory Theatre's production of Michael Frayn's farce is really just what we all need to see right now to take the edges off the quake stress we have all been thrown into, yet again. It was wonderful hearing real belly laughs from the audience, a real treat. The plot is a play within a play and that can be tricky to pull off, as it can be hard for the audience to grasp who is who and what the roles are, from both aspects of the performance. I will say here that the set was extremely clever and worked in a way that left the audience with no doubt that they were either watching the 'play' or the 'performance'. There was also a great moment of glory for the stagehands because of this design and this was a joyous moment for the audience, even though not a line was exchanged.

Noises Off is packed with physical comedic opportunities and they are utilised to full effect by this talented cast. I particularly note one of my favourite moments was the view through the door from backstage as Brooke (Miriam van Voorthuizen) entered the set of the 'play'. I could have sworn she probably required hospitalisation after that entrance! I won't spoil it, but I will say Voorthuizen, you provided a sense of physical comedy that was top notch and worthy of much praise throughout the night, proving there is no such thing as a stereotype of a 'dumb blonde' on the stage.

Of course, the lines in the 'play' are as cliché as they come in a farce, but the cast makes a good distinction between the dual roles they have created. All the cast had clearly worked on their characters' foibles to the point where they knew them so well that they came naturally within their performances.

First on stage is Dotty/Mrs Clackett (Karen Hallsworth) working the absent-minded actor motif to perfection to the point

where anyone who has ever had to make a speech or stand in front of a group of people will take her into their heart immediately.

Like any farce, it's all about the couples. The hapless couple trying to cop off with each other Gary (John Bayne) and Brooke (Voorthuizen) were well matched. Gary, the anti-hero, and Brooke, the blonde bimbo were in their secondary characters equally as ridiculous and not at all interested in each other, which made Voorthuizen's wooden performance of Brooke, hilarious. The second couple Flavia (Donna Alley) and Philip (Noam Wegner) spend their time on stage being utterly confused, and they did this so well. These are clearly actors who know the form of the plot so well they can then let it go and move through it like it's second nature.

Another comedic staple, the running gag, is woven throughout Noises Off and I won't mention them all here because it would spoil the magic but one character is a running gag himself. The rebelliousness of the hobo-like Selsdon

(Russell Haigh) and his drunken misadventures was a nice nod to the ways in which some people behave in times of stress. I very much doubt that Haigh could have made this character more relatable. Most work places have at least one Selsdon in the mix.

The introduction of the character of Lloyd (Julian Anderson), who is the director of the 'play', was a nice transition for the audience to grasp what was actually going on. Anderson, directing from the front row of the audience at one point helped to engage the audience, it was a nice touch. Anderson was a convincing, demanding director who actually reminded me of a character from Summer Heights High, Mr G. I apologise if you have not seen this mockumentary, but my daughter (14) totally related to Anderson's performance as a typical over ambitious director as depicted in this comedy television series.

To me, the character of Poppy, the stage manager (Emma Price) is an underwritten character, and this is a shame because Price does a

belting stress-head and uses great vocal dynamics within the role. It would have been nice to see her with more lines within this play, but the writer really kept them to the minimum. I will say, when Price is present, she makes the most of it. One of my favourite characters of the night was Tim, the backstage runner (Terry McCartan). An awkward character made all the more painstakingly awkward by the comic timing of McCartan. In my opinion, McCartan is very capable of being a convincing stand-up comedian just by being in the room. He has a manner that echoes the ease of being awkward, and it's a technique used in many a successful comedy series, an example here would be Ross, in Friends, it's not just the lines that make him funny, more often it's the silences in between and the facial expressions; Terry McCartan has clearly studied this technique – bang on.

Speaking of banging, a huge well done to those in this production who keep the doors working! The reality is, if those babies fail, this production will

come unstuck. I hope you get the pats on the back you deserve every night from the cast. All the specifics aside, a comedy will not work without maximum energy from every last person involved. This comedy worked. By the end of this season, I guarantee the actors will be fitter and weigh about 10 kilos less, they move so fast and work so hard at building an awesome degree of chaos. Congratulations to director Ravil Atlas, this is a tight production and so well cast; thanks for a great night out.

I urge people to go and have a giggle and enjoy the ravishing ridiculousness that is Noises Off. Laughter is such a precious thing and it is so healing for the soul. When I left the theatre I felt physically better and actually lighter and I think that is the value of a good performance: it transports you to somewhere else, and hopefully resonates beyond the theatre and stays with you for some time after.

Noises Off plays at the Elmwood auditorium until 3 December.