

Review: The Homecoming

[Lara Medlam](#) is left a little flat after Drama Soc's ambitious grapple with Pinter

Saturday 25 February 2017



Image: Harry Elletson Photography and Design

Venue: The Drama Barn

★★★☆☆

Harold Pinter is a master of the ambiguous pause, and many critics have regarded *The Homecoming* as such a masterpiece. Unfortunately, this current Drama Soc production failed to shine a light on the sheer subtlety and brewing depths at the core of this intriguing play. Possible interpretations range from that of comedy, to a commentary on masculinity and sexual politics, or an incisive evisceration of the family unit. In this instance, it was unclear which way it wanted to go. I ordinarily find myself impressed by what Drama Soc are able to manage, all crammed into the confines of fleeting term times and workloads. However, in this instance, I feel this particular production may have bitten off a little more than it can chew.

The play is set in a seedy North London house, home to a family of four men: Max, the raging patriarch, his ineffectual brother, Sam, and Max's sons, Lenny and Joey. When Teddy, the oldest brother and successful 'doctor of philosophy' comes to visit from America with his wife, Ruth, the family's usual bickering is infused with an extra layer of malice and enigma. The inscrutable Ruth, this lone female figure, becomes the catalyst for the twisting, surprising passage of events in the play.

Alfie Lanham-Brown as Max captured a good tone of voice and manner, but seemed somewhat flat initially, and his subsequent bursts of outrage and anger jarred with the general pace of the character. Amelia Hamilton as Ruth managed to command a cool authority, and she had a appealing, knowing way

about her. But it felt as if the cast was very aware of the fact that she was an interrupting force, rather than really feeling it. Cullum Ball stood out. Playing Lenny, the middle son who engaged in rather dubious business interests, Ball created a real character, full of soft malice and an apparent, but impenetrable agenda which was fascinating to watch. Some London accents were better than others, but they were all consistent. Similarly, the range of facial expressions and mannerisms was patchy, sometimes gripping and subtle, other times overlaid or simply absent – I feel more could have been done to emphasise the power of the unspoken.

Pinter is a challenge and although hackles raised, hopes flickered and crashed and events spiralled, the overall sparks were a bit damp. The stage should have reeked with brittle, amped up testosterone and Ruth's arrival should have provided a more limpid, suggestible contrast. Certain moments, the cheese sandwich incident, the glasses of water, the accusations of 'resentment' that Max flings at his nearest and not so dearest – these were all thoughtfully and entertainingly realised and illustrated the cast and crew's potential. However, it too often felt as if the players were acting with themselves, rather than as a cohesive unit and this, combined with erratic pacing overall, left holes in the characterisation and a lack of nuance. The reactions, the inner struggles and pleasures, the unspoken dynamic; when these were evident, it was great, but as such, all too apparent when lacking. You need the exaggerated gestures to lend the vagaries of the script some intent. Where were the overarching directorial decisions? Each cast member seemed to have a clear idea of how they'd play their role, and accordingly played it for themselves, rather than for the play as a whole.

The sparse set made sense, but simultaneously offered nothing to hide behind. Just as Pinter gives one nothing to hide behind; the intricacies and ambiguities of character are rawly exposed. When this works, it's a treat, when it doesn't, the onslaught of ambiguities descends into sluggishness. I admire the choice of play and enjoyed the gleams of thoughtfulness in their overall approach, however, I don't think the full power of *The Homecoming* was unlocked.



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