

Trouble on Olympus

DATE	17th March 2023
SOCIETY	Bampton Players
VENUE	Riverside Hall, Bampton
TYPE OF PRODUCTION	Play
DIRECTOR	Wendy Boothroyd
PRODUCER	Sue Shaw: Stage Manager Hugh Saxby and Team
WRITTEN BY	Denise Hill

Report

Author: Lyn Burgoyne

I was delighted to attend the dress rehearsal for the world premier of Trouble on Olympus especially as the production has already sold out its performances.

Bampton Players certainly know how to connect with their audiences and keep their members occupied. During the pandemic and lockdown era, members were invited to write a play that could or may be produced by The Bampton Players. Having produced The Ghosts of Martha Rudd last year, the winner of the competition, we have been delighted with another well written and produced piece of theatre with Trouble on Olympus written By Denise Hill, a longstanding member of The Bampton Players and a retired teacher of Latin.

The writer's expertise and knowledge of the Greek Myths and Legends clearly showed throughout the play which was expertly directed by Wendy Boothroyd.

Greek music is heard as the play begins. The stage was sparsely set with a small table and chairs and laid with crockery. There were also two director chairs and a delightful painting of Mount Olympus, painted by a local resident, hanging on the rear wall. The Goddess Hera, dressed in a white toga and laurel leaf crown is sat reading a copy of the local paper as her, somewhat, philandering husband, Zeus enters wearing white robes and shouting for his dinner. The play continues with Hera, a disgruntled and malcontent wife, complaining about Zeus' need to disguise himself to carry on extra -marital relations with mortals and his partying with Hermes and Dionysus. Zeus then reciprocating with jibes such as "you were born so long ago, Hera" and complaining about her lumpy and burned Ambrosia are heard. They both behave as an old married couple would in current day with Hera pointing

out that their anniversary was today and Zeus had obviously forgotten. Both these actors appeared extremely comfortable in their parts and were very relaxed working together. Their obvious annoyance of each other was well portrayed and both had superb diction and projection, clearly narrating the story to the audience and setting the scene well.

They are interrupted by Sally Watkins, a mortal they believe, entering and introducing herself as "The Prompt". Hera and Zeus are confused, the prompt for what, they do not need a prompt, they are Gods, they are not in a play, there are no lines to learn? The confusion continues with the entrance of the director, Charles, another mortal, giving stage instructions.

Hermes enters to a number of giggles from the audience, wearing a Greek robe and a black bowler Hat on which are attached golden wings! Well, he is the messenger of the gods. Amusingly played, forgetful Hermes discusses the antics of the previous evening with Zeus, with poor, unappreciated Hera listening in. Hermes was played especially well in that he was a complete contrast to the others with a dry wit and serious sarcasm. Great characterisation and clear diction.

Then the delightful and extremely flirtation Aphrodite enters to the music of The Stripper, with pink touches to her white robes. With exceptional comic timing, this actor worked her lines beautifully such as "any part your give me will throb with passion"!

As the play evolves and develops you begin to discover a very funny play within a play (as such) but with a somewhat poignant message played out.

As we continue through the second act, Zeus, Hera, Hermes and Aphrodite (who amusingly is constantly trying to seduce Charles, the director) are concerned if they are still 'relevant' with Hermes stating "we are irrelevant, we don't actually exist. We are only here for as long as the mortals choose to keep us here. Their imaginations keep us going".

Unhappy and concerned with this analogy, Zeus angrily fells Sally Watkins (not Hawkins or any other name that Hera gets wrong as a running gag throughout the play) with his thunderbolt, leading to roars of laughter from the audience to the line "you've killed the prompt". Very funny.

Hermes grabs Sally's script, amazed to see every word of the play Trouble on Olympus written on it, as if scripted by mortals as puppeteers for the Gods. This is significant.

Lightening the mood, Steve, the caretaker, enters, sweeping up, as if he was closing the hall after rehearsals and with a very good Wolverhampton accent urges the actors to leave as he has to “take the cat to the vets”! A very good cameo from a new member.

Finally, Thalia enters, she is one of The Three Graces. She reveals that Sally Watkins, who thankfully is not felled, is actually Euphrosyne and that Charles is Aglaia. They are The Three Graces, mischievous but not mortal and have played an impish trick on Zeus and Hera. The Three Graces then surprise them with a party for their anniversary. I have to comment that all three of these actors are a delight to watch. They project well and their characterisations are good. There were a couple of prompts required but this was a dress-rehearsal and that is what a dress-rehearsal is for.

Relieved and still a little confused, the immortals begin to enjoy their party but question the Three Graces about the lines on the script, how did they write those lines written on Sally’s prompt clipboard?

“ There are no lines” states Aglaia, Thalia and Euphrosyne. puzzled, “they are just blank pieces of paper”! Are we all just part of a play? Thought provoking indeed.

The set, although sparse, was perfect for such a story. The costumes were simple but worked particularly well, defining the Immortals in Greek Dress and the mortals in modern clothing.

Well done to the production team. The actors were well lit and could be seen and heard at all times.

I would also like to add all of the actors on stage played to the front and had great stage presence. It frustrates any audience member when they cannot see the lovely faces on stage.

The script was hilarious, with in-jokes about, Ares, Eros and including mentions of the Roman names for the Greek gods, such as Jupiter (Zeus) and Hera being Juno. It was also extremely educational and explanatory regarding the Classics and ancient Greek Mythology. I had no idea there was a *Goddess Necessity who fixes the decrees of Fate, whom neither Gods or mortals can oppose*. It reminded me of the Horrible Histories Series whose writers have made learning history fun for children.

Trouble on Olympus, more like Triumph on Olympus. I thoroughly enjoyed this World Premier. Well done indeed to the writer, director, production team and the whole cast.

Lyn Burgoyne

Noda Rep (Mid and East Devon)