

Company: Blyth Players
Production: Stags and Hens (The Remix)
Director: Jon Hughes & Andrew Robinson
Venue: Barnby Memorial Hall
Date: 21st May 2016

Stags and Hens is set in the Gents and Ladies Toilets at a trashy northern Club where both Linda (The Bride) and Dave (The Groom) have decided to hold their stag and hen nights, not knowing that their other half is at the same club. It was originally written in 1978 for television and drama students of the then Manchester Polytechnic, as an in-house television production. It was first adapted for performance in 2008 as 'Stags and Hens - The Remix' at The Royal Court Theatre, Liverpool and has been described as firmly in the centre of Willie Russell's best achievements: lively, coarse, well-organised, truthful and very funny.

Tonight Blyth Players took this quality piece of writing and made it their own and delivered what has to be one of the best pieces of theatre I have seen in a long time. The Barnby Memorial Hall has some limitations in terms of space, seating, sound and lighting but tonight none of that detracted in any way from the central strength of the acting, characterisation, set and sound design brought together by the Directing combination of Jon Hughes, Andrew Robinson and their talented production team.

At the heart of Stags and Hens are the friendships and relationships within the two groups, and to be a success these relationships have to be believable, the performances need to be naturalistic, and the language used in the play has to be 'real' - not forced – and the entire cast succeeded in this without exception. In addition, the character development the cast achieved as the play progressed was very impressive.

First the Hens; **Lucy Robinson** made Bernadette – the brassy, opinionated, sarcastic, vulnerable, loyal to her friends '*pack leader*' her own; **Louise Collingham** brought exactly the right desperation, self-doubt and comedic timing to the '*happy (on the edge) drunk*' Maureen and should be congratulated for getting the level of intoxication in her performance exactly right. **Jeanette Adams** as Carol again delivered the perfect combination of sarcasm, passion and protection for her friends (and willingness to drop them if the chance to cop off with Robbie came along); **Hannah Ransford** played Frances, bezzie of the 'Bride', very sympathetically and with great comic timing and with obvious care and concern for Linda even when she was acting like a stupid bitch (in Frances' eyes). **Lucy Greaves** in Linda the 'Bride' has one of the most difficult roles to portray, as she struggles with the competing emotions about the next day's Wedding, her doubts about Love and the future on one side, her fear of letting down so many people on the other. Lucy pulled this challenge off exceptionally well, her conflict was obvious without being cliché and her interactions with the Hens and 'Peter her ex' expertly understated and real.

Now the Stags: **Adam Betts** portrayal of Robbie, the pack leader of the boys, was bang on. Adam managed to bring out the depth of the character (his support/love for his friends, his need to demonstrate he was an alpha male who could pull any girl he wanted, his weakness that his life had not amounted to much) without over playing or over acting at any stage of the evening. **Simon Goodman's** Kav displayed the vulnerability of the character and his reliance on the Stags to overcome his self doubt; **Adam Spencer** made Billy his own, effectively providing the glue between the boys, acting as intermediary, confidante and support for the less confident members of the team. **Michael Pearce** was a superb Eddy - bringing the aggression, single minded support of Dave the 'Groom' and hatred of Dancing and anyone who would hurt his friend to the fore. His confrontation with Lucy (Linda) in the girls toilets was judged to perfection being both intimidating and believable and was one of the dramatic highlights of the night. **Jak Allison** played Peter, the outsider and agent of change, very well bringing the promise and possibilities of the outside world into focus for Lucy. **Chris Hallam** was a suitably comatose incoherent 'Dave the Groom to Be' judging well the physicality required and **Andrew Robinson** provided great support as Peter's Roadie when not performing his Directing duties.

Acting performances and pacing don't happen by accident, so both Jon and Andrew should be suitably proud of this great piece of theatre as should the rest of the team. The set was just right and the continual 'Club Music' backing track that increased in volume when the door was opened was timed to perfection. Many Congratulations to all and I look forward to seeing where Blyth Players go next!