GREATER MANCHESTER DRAMA FEDERATION  
3 ACT PLAY FESTIVAL 2011/12

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Society</th>
<th>Lyceum Players</th>
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<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Death of a Salesman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author</td>
<td>Arthur Miller</td>
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<tr>
<td>Date &amp; Time</td>
<td>Tuesday 17th April @ 7.30pm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Venue</td>
<td>Lyceum Theatre, Oldham</td>
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<tr>
<td>Contact/host name</td>
<td>Joan Duffin</td>
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<tr>
<td>Contact on the night</td>
<td>Nigel Marland/FOH</td>
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<tr>
<td>Young actors in cast?</td>
<td>No</td>
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<tr>
<td>Licence available</td>
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Production highlights:
Terrific cast with every character carefully worked on
Great use of space and variety of moves in sometimes confined areas
Atmospheric lighting and great choice of music

To think about for the future:
Occasional different use of space for some scenes, eg so not always cramped areas
Be aware of lighting issues at front of stage (I know you know this!)

The Play:
A classic play, which needs little introduction, except to say it still resonates today, and requires intelligent staging and playing to really bring out all the depths and themes.
**THE PRODUCTION**

Adjudicator identifies themes, challenges and requirements etc, and comments on the details and elements of the production in which he was particularly interested.

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<th>TECHNICAL</th>
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| **Set and props**  
*A set which shows creativity and innovation, addresses the style of the production, and is well constructed. Props which are in period, authentic in appearance, and placed strategically e.g. furniture.* |
| The setting poses a number of challenges for a designer, especially in a limited space, but you had obviously thought about how to convey the various scenes, and utilise your playing area in the optimum way.  
The central focus of the kitchen provided the largest space, with cooker, fridge, table and chairs enhancing the room, and shelving allowing room for props such as the stockings and sewing basket, the phone, and various jugs and glasses. There was a curtained entrance at the back of the kitchen, leading to the rest of the house. Occasionally, people could be seen passing behind this, and it did waft slightly when this happened, so maybe a thicker curtain of a darker colour may have been more suitable, but it was still an effective entrance/exit and use of space.  
The two bedrooms, positioned at either side of the stage, although fairly cramped, gave a claustrophobic feel to the house, but were large enough for the necessary number of beds and a certain amount of floor area, which was well used. Different wallpaper and suitable bed sheets, pillowcases, etc gave the bedrooms the right contrast, and again the use of wall shelving provided space for props and decoration. The curtained area on the wall SL gave the impression of a window, which worked well, and the banisters leading ‘downstairs’ gave depth and scale to the spaces on both sides. Perhaps some slightly worn or even threadbare carpeting or rugs on the floor would have given a slightly more homely and comfortable feel to these areas.  
Front of stage, we had space for the many other scenes, either in the garden, in the offices or bar, or just a general area for various memories of Willy. This again was used well, although the permanent foliage and brick wall always tended to define the house and garden, rather than the other areas, but this is just an observation. |
There was an obvious entrance to the house, which, as the script implied, wasn't used in some of the 'memory' sequences, as people walked through walls. Although this does state to do so clearly in the script, because of the obvious entrance to the house, this sometimes did actually appear a little odd. But perhaps that's Miller for you!

Props were generally excellent, with great thought behind the period and the setting. There was good positioning of props for scenes from the cast – especially Howard's recording machine, and the office equipment for Charley’s office. The nightclub was well set, with good use being made of stage management (and in character too!).

I thought, perhaps, Bernard’s bag in Act 2 was a little old and tatty for someone now so affluent, but this is a minor criticism in an otherwise superb area.

My only real comment about the whole setting – and, again, it isn't really a negative, just an observation – is that as so much of Act 2 takes place outside the Loman household, it was a shame this area wasn’t a little larger, or altered slightly for the second half, maybe making the kitchen smaller, or actually using this space especially for the bar scene. After 2 different office scenes downstage left, followed by the bar scene downstage right, then the motel scene again downstage left, it just seemed a shame that so much space wasn’t being used, and that movements, although worked on well, were a little repetitive and cramped.

However, that is to take nothing away from the superb design and building work of the set, with attention to detail such as the brickwork, the shelving, the props, the bedding, etc, all lending atmosphere and suitability to the era and style of the production.

| Lighting and Sound Effects which contribute towards the dramatic potential, |
| Technical areas are always first rate at your theatre, and there was no exception here. Both lighting and excellent music and sound were used to create atmosphere and ambience, the lights complementing the mood of the piece, and the |
etc. sound underscoring or commenting on certain scenes, for added effect.

I know you have an issue front of stage with lights, and this was overcome with subtle additional smaller lights, and as much spill from other lights as possible. As so much of the action took place in this area, especially in Act 2, there was bound to be some issues, and just occasionally, people’s faces were in shadow. This did lend an eerie atmosphere to the piece, and shadows are part of memories, but sometimes it was during an important moment, or when you really wanted to catch the expression in someone’s eyes, so it spoilt the overall effect, albeit only slightly.

Lights in the ‘main’ area – the kitchen and bedrooms – were excellent, well isolated and effective, and even in some of the front scenes, the change of lights was done well, to indicate different times and areas. The leaf/garden gobo effect was well used, as was the red light for the bar scene in Act 2.

There were a couple of times I thought lights could have been used a little more effectively, one was when Linda was on the phone at the beginning of Act 2 when there were shadows on her, and then the lights dimmed slowly but came up on Howard setting the furniture for his scene; secondly, was when Bernard came to tell Linda that Biff had flunked maths. This was such an important moment, as it leads to a lot of what happens in Biff’s life, but the characters were in almost complete darkness at the back of the set, which was a shame.

These comments aside, there is no doubting the work and creative input that had gone into the lighting design and operation.

Sound throughout was superb, with real thought behind the choice of music and the effect it was having on the atmosphere of the production. The flute music, especially, was evocative and well chosen, as were the ambient sounds and montage of voices and noises leading towards the end of the play.
The only time sound wasn’t quite as clear as it might have been was in the recording of Howard’s son reciting the capitals of the US states. The delivery here wasn’t quite as well pitched as it might have been, which meant the clarity wasn’t too good to fully hear what was being said.

Maybe some sound in the bar scene would have worked, whether music or noise from other patrons, but you may have thought about this, and decided it wasn’t necessary, or would be distracting. And perhaps the choral music for the funeral was a little OTT, but again what was used certainly conveyed the desired atmosphere.

All in all, great care and thought had been taken in these areas, and my comments are about enhancing the work that had gone in, rather than a reflection of anything substandard or ineffective.

<table>
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<th>Costumes</th>
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<td><strong>Costumes</strong>&lt;br&gt;<em>Costumes which are of the period, well fitting, colour co-ordinated and enhance characterisation.</em></td>
<td>Great thought and work had gone into this department, especially with some of the quick changes for the characters who we see at different times in their lives.</td>
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<td>Willy’s suit, blue shirt, braces and tie were in keeping with the salesman character, and the costumes for Linda, Biff and Happy, whether bedtime or daytime wear, were suitable and effective for the time and place.</td>
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<td>It was good to see thought behind characters such as Uncle Ben, in his ghostly white suit, which made him otherworldly as well as something of the African fortune hunter. Similarly, the Woman’s outfits, especially the white/cream skirt and suit in Act 1, gave her a different feel and style to the other characters, certainly a vivid visual contrast to Linda.</td>
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<td>The younger versions of Biff and Happy were established effectively with shorts and sports jackets, which gave a contrast to the more grown up appearances in waistcoats, jackets and ties. Bernard and Charley benefited here too, with the more ‘immature’ look (stockings, breeches) contrasting with their appearances in smart business suits.</td>
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Howard was well established in his suit, there was a good change from Jenny to Letta to help establish the same actress playing 2 roles, and Miss Forsythe looked good in her red dress, hat and gloves. Stanley and the additional help from stage management looked suitably attired too.

All in all, this was a well-dressed production, with real thought behind the costumes, and what they said about the characters, in that time and place.

| Makeup and hair | No concerns in this area at all, as whatever make-up used, was in keeping with the characters, and not noticeable. |
| Make hair and wigs which are in period and appropriate to the production (including size of venue) and assist in developing the character. | Perhaps, just perhaps, Biff and Happy’s hair needed to be shorter, more the style of the 50s, but this wasn’t a major problem, and slicking it back helped. |

**DIRECTION**

*Detailed study/knowledge and interpretation of the text; progressing the author’s intent with creativity and sensitivity.*

*Using theatrical dynamics to communicate with the audience.*

*Appropriate delivery of the text using timing and rhythm.*

*Settings with regard to focus, variety and suitability of pace, and groupings.*

*Movement which is appropriate to the period and style of production.*

*Creating atmosphere and mood to develop the full dramatic impact.*

**Director – Pauline Walsh**

Well-known plays such as this can prove a challenge to a director perhaps wanting to stamp their own mark on them, or not wanting to be judged against the many productions gone before. What was clear here was the evident regard for the play and the characters, and the desire to tell the story in the clearest and most direct way.

Not only did you have a terrific cast who provided some memorable and intelligent performances, you had a great set and great support from the entire backstage team on costumes, lights, sound, props and stage management. When that confidence in a production comes through, it can make the director’s task a much easier one, but there is still no denying the work and thought you had put into it.
What I liked about this production was the use of space and movement. I have seen so many plays when people just sit or stand in a room, and speak to each other with no animation, expression or variety of movement or tone. Here, even in the more cramped bedrooms, or at the front of the stage, you had evidently worked on positioning and moves, so people were seen in different attitudes and stances, keeping the energy up, and really helping to focus on their characters and thoughts.

For instance, it would have been so easy to play the first two scenes with either Willy and Linda or Biff and Happy static in their rooms, or on their beds, because of the limited space, but you had them constantly changing position, which made much more dynamic and effective conversations than merely being in one place and speaking great chunks of dialogue. This showed superbly the restlessness of the situation, the need to move in cramped, claustrophobic conditions, and the limitations, even, of the people in this house.

This concentration on moves and positionings continued throughout the play, so that even a relatively small scene like the first one between Willy and the Woman, or the ones between Willy and Ben, had animation and movement, and longer scenes in the bar or with Charley and Bernard, were enhanced with the energy this movement gives.

As mentioned in the technical section, great use was made of the space to show all the different places, from the Lomans’ house, to the various offices, motel room, bar and garden. I just thought a slight rethinking for Act 2 was needed, as the majority of the scenes tended to be played along the front of the stage, so the great space in the kitchen, for example, was rather underused. I thought you’d put loads of detail into these scenes, so they didn’t become repetitive or samey, but it just became a shame that so much was out front, when space and lights were a little bit of an issue. Certainly, the bar scene would have worked if it had been opened out, giving the characters a little more room to breathe and move, rather than being slightly cramped at a small table with small bar stools. Similarly, after the scene in Howard’s office downstage left, this was followed with a scene in Charley’s office, in the exact same area, with a repeat of the moves that you could realistically do here.

This is to take nothing away from what was achieved in these areas, or the ability of the actors and technical support; it would have just been nice to open a couple of these scenes out, I think, and have them in different areas.

Where the work evidently paid off, and it shows that setting isn’t always important, is in the strength of the characters and the relationships unfolding. The Lomans were a REAL family, not always easy to convey, but here the relationships between husband and wife, father and sons, and the two brothers, were expertly crafted, with real feeling and expression. The terrific scene in the kitchen between Linda, Biff and Happy was a great piece of theatre, with everyone feeling every word, the electric dialogue and intent really coming alive, and a true sense of a family falling apart and, for once,
saying what they mean.

There was also great chemistry between Willy and Linda, which worked exceptionally well in the more tender moments, such as the end of Act 1, and the moments before Willy drives to his death in Act 2, and these were a great contrast to the equally effective moments between Willy and The Woman, where even this small but important role made an impression, and delivered a well-paced and suitably ‘sexy’ scene.

What was also good to see was how the more minor characters weren’t just playing second fiddle to the family. Bernard and Charley were superb in both their expressions and delivery, and in their effective changes in age and stature as the play progressed; Stanley, Miss Forsythe and Letta made the most of their time on stage, and produced the required effect; and Howard’s delivery, accent and general demeanour spoke volumes in his one important scene. It’s so refreshing to see good actors playing even minor roles with the concentration, dedication and commitment required, and helping to enhance a production with intelligent and often sensitive performances.

There was also real work done in achieving the desired changes in time and reality, so it was always obvious when we had gone back in time, or something was happening in Willy’s head. This was done with a combination of different attitudes and expressions in the cast, superb changes in costumes, and well thought out lighting and sound effects, all helping to enhance this production.

In fact, so good was the overall style and power of the direction, there were many moments when I stopped writing notes and just enjoyed the story and the performances, which is always great to be able to say. And this level of attention continued right up to and including the curtain call, which was done with people getting into position in light, which again gave even the ending a pace and energy.

For such a well-known play, it is great that it still speaks and resonates years later, and the clarity of this production – with great sound and music really enhancing the atmosphere and situations – shows why it has stood the test of time. With terrific work on characters, developing situations brought to the foreground, and real emotion and expression making every line count, this was a memorable production, brought to life with inspired, unfussy, and dedicated direction. Well done.

**ACTORS**

*Characterisation which is believable and shows flair, originality and understanding.*

*Vocal quality which is appropriate to the play and is delivered with good understanding and technique.*

*Movement which is in character and in period, and incorporated into the*
performance to deliver pace and variety.

Supporting one’s fellow actors unselfishly and enhancing their performance.

Using all available theatrical skills to make a noticeable contribution to the play.

(Include individual adjudications for each actor.)

Willy Loman – Phil McCarthy

From the moment you walked on with your suitcases, muttering ‘boy oh boy’, weary, dejected and at a loss how to continue, it was clear this was going to be a sensitive and well-judged performance, with plenty of emotion, expression and empathy.

This is not an easy role, and the danger could be to signal the decline, to not allow the other facets of his personality to shine, and to play everything too samey and safe. But you took risks, and were all the better for it. For instance, your constant ‘don’t interrupt’ comments to Linda during key scenes, your relationships with your sons, especially Biff, and the effective interchanges between yourself and characters such as Charley, Howard, and especially The Woman, all showed slightly different sides and facets to this man.

Your portrayal of the tired ‘failure’ was superb, especially your constant wondering of where all the money went and why people aren’t buying off him anymore, but was enhanced with moments when he believes, misguidedy, he is going to get his life back on track – either through his sons, through talking to Howard, or through his continued work. It was heartbreaking to see, despite him bringing some things on himself through his attitude or actions, how other things were railing against him, and he was, by this point, destined to fail. You brought all these thoughts – whether hopeful, misguided, lost, frustrated, impatient – out extremely well, to make a well-rounded and believable man.

Just occasionally, I thought your outbursts, although genuine and heartfelt, were a little sudden, rather than organic from the situation and circumstances, and I would have liked to have seen you relax just a little in some of your less exacting scenes, especially with the younger Biff and even with the Woman, but these are minor comments in an otherwise well-judged performance.

Without doubt, this was a mature and intelligent portrayal, and it was fantastic not only to see you take on a very different part as this, but also to use your experience to nail it with confidence and an emotional truth. Well done, mate.

Linda Loman – Sue Radcliffe

One of Miller’s classic women roles, supporting the man in her life despite his obvious flaws, and then left to pick up the pieces and carry on, this was an intense and superbly judged performance, with plenty of nuances and layers. From the opening scene in the bedroom, to the emotional final moments, we were in the hands of a confident and experienced performer, with lots of
texture to the words, and superb variety of tone and expression, to offer up a real and memorable performance.

Your scenes with Willy were superbly handled, with sensitivity and determination, but you really lit up the stage in your scenes with Biff and Happy, where the delicacy of the situation was matched with heartfelt and often angry comments, but done so in a believable and convincing way. This was a real situation in a real family, and you finally snapping at your sons’ behaviours, despite trying to keep everything running smoothly, was heartbreaking and heartfelt.

There was a great contrast between Linda now and Linda in the younger scenes, with more energy and lightness of touch, but there was a real feel of this being the same person at different points in her life and marriage. Your reactions to Ben were superb too, especially the shift in her when she says ‘Have a nice trip’, and your constant support of your husband and his position in life.

The final scene was touching also, heartfelt without being overdone, trying to keep her emotion in check, and crumbling probably due to her inability to stop the man she loved from taking his own life, despite her best efforts.

All in all, this was a multi-layered and memorable performance, and a truly excellent portrayal of a strong and determined, but ultimately tragic and helpless character.

**Biff – Lee Brennan**

This was a convincing and multi-faceted performance of a man finally having, if not exactly to grow up, then at least to confront some of his actions and decisions of the past, and acknowledge the part his upbringing and the influence of his father have played in determining his own character.

There was a real sense of siblings in the first scene with yourself and Happy, and this was explored further as the play progressed, with visits to your youth, and the ongoing relationship with your father. Things came to a head in the terrific scene with Linda, yourself and Happy in the kitchen in Act 1, and from then on Biff’s fate, whether he knows it or not, is sealed.

You have a strong voice, with good expression and delivery, and you had good differences in your appearances as younger and older Biff. Especially effective were your trying to tell Willy about your meeting with Oliver, and the revelation that your father was seeing someone else in a motel room, when different emotions and moments of intensity were explored well.

Only in your final moments did the emotion take over slightly, and I thought you could have varied the shouting and pacing, just so it wasn’t all on one level and ever so slightly mannered, rather than natural. Your final breakdown in your father’s arms was also a little hard to decipher, so don’t let emotion –
however heartfelt and genuine – get in the way of clarity of diction and delivery.

Having said that, this was still a fine and well-judged portrayal of a complex character, with many telling and intelligently thought out moments, and an overall convincing story arc and character journey.

**Happy – John Hoyle**

As the younger sibling, living in the shadow of the rest of his family to a great extent, and often trying to rebel against it, this was a focused and committed performance, with real thought behind delivery, attitude and expression.

You used a variety of speech patterns and adjusted the pitch of your delivery to show the contrast between younger and older Happy, and your body language changed effectively too, to really convey the time and age difference. Added to this was your determination to have a good time, with the probably false, and rather immature, reassurances to his family that he will get married and settle down.

Although some of the other characters on stage have bigger moments than Happy, you have a little more self-awareness than most, and you really came into your own in the scenes with your family, especially with your mum in the kitchen in Act 1. Here your silent expressions spoke as much as the words you used, and in the scene in the bar, where you’re trying to calm everyone down and make a good night of it, despite the conflict of emotions between your father and brother, you really showed the different sides to Happy, wanting to please, wanting a good time, and almost oblivious to the tragedy about to happen in front of him.

Overall, this was an assured and confident performance, with a real sense of the time and place, and an almost effortlessly convincing relationship with the other members of your family, especially your brother, demonstrated with genuine reactions throughout, and many moments of intense and convincing emotion.

**Uncle Ben – Ian Orry**

Your ghostly appearance and serene, almost enigmatic, movements really made this often otherworldly character come to life, and provided some memorable interchanges with Willy. It can be hard to differentiate what is real about Ben, and what Willy wants to remember, but you played this with a consistent approach, and worked in goading Willy into something he never was, or, rather, could never have been.

Just watch your voice, as at times it got a little quiet, especially in some of the dialogue towards the end of the play. Even if you are just whispering, or quietly talking, it still needs to be heard, so don’t be afraid of projecting.
Also, as a lot of your scenes were at the front of the stage and there is a little issue with lighting, just be careful your face doesn’t get too hidden. Your hat over the front of your head didn’t help matters, so it may have worked if you’d pushed it back a little, but then you did tend to talk with your head bowed down slightly. Yes, this is a play about memories and shadows, but I still think it’s important to see expression and eyes at key times, so just something to be aware of for the future.

This was a memorable and well-paced performance, with plenty of discipline and focus.

Charley – Peter Fitton

This was a sincere and sensitive portrayal, ever so slightly underplayed, which, I felt, worked really well in sustaining a contrasting role to Willy as one of the other father figures in the play.

You made each moment on stage count, whether playing late night cards in the kitchen, or as a younger man with his son, offering Willy a job, or just giving him money. Here was a man who could see what was happening to his neighbour, if not always his friend, but wasn’t always sure of the best way to help him.

I liked your natural delivery and well-timed flashes of humour throughout (“You sneeze in here, and in my house hats blow off”), and the feeling of a real hardworking man, making the best out of situations, and offering the hand of friendship when needed.

This was a real case of there being no small roles, as you made the character come alive in each scene, and were memorable and focused throughout. Well done.

Bernard – Stephen Nathaniel

Almost playing two characters, as you made the change from younger Bernard to older so different, this was a lovely portrayal, where the contrast between him and Willy’s sons, and the success Bernard himself becomes, really came into its own.

You had a great, ‘geeky’ voice for young Bernard, which was still believable, especially with the glasses and costume, and you made a great underdog to confident, well-liked Biff. But your older Bernard was definitely his father’s son, as you had the same business confidence as Charley, with a similar lack of arrogance or attitude.

I liked the energy and discipline you brought to the role, and the fact you made the most of your short scenes, and really held your own throughout.
short, this was an excellent portrayal, and showed the real difference that upbringing, attitude and hard work can have on a young man. Well done.

Howard – Damien Kavanagh

A relaxed performance, with a great accent and lots of confidence, this scene really worked at showing how out of touch with reality Willy has become, and how he clings onto the past. Your enthusiasm for hearing members of your family on the recording machine (and hence another father figure in the play), together with your refusal to listen to Willy’s request, didn’t come across as needlessly heartless, just as good business sense, and a certain lack of attachment or at least sentiment to the past.

I would perhaps have liked a little more animation from you, especially in the early moments, as you enthused over the recordings, oblivious to the predicament Willy is in, and perhaps a bit more business to keep you occupied in the subsequent dialogue, almost so you didn’t have to face Willy and see his anguish and expression. I think this would have helped to establish a real businessman, unemotional with the past, but trying to do the best for the needs of his business.

However, this was still a strong and disciplined performance, with great timing and expression, and a natural and unenforced accent.

Stanley – Stephen Hendren

More than just a character added to a scene for atmosphere and setting, your stance and demeanour portrayed an efficient and professional waiter, and your delivery and rapport especially with Happy, was well timed and convincing.

Here we saw a waiter with common sense and a keen eye for detail, able to hold his own in a situation, whilst also ensuring people in his establishment were happy and entertained. Although not a great deal of depth in the character as written, you showed discipline and commitment in the role, and provided a focused and well-delivered performance.

Miss Forstythe – Wendy Stringer

Making the most of your short time on stage, and looking splendid in your red dress, hat and gloves, this was a confident and poised portrayal, with good delivery and great attitude throughout.

Miller doesn’t really give his women much to do in this play, as all except Linda are minor characters, but you brought Miss Forsythe to life by giving her character and expression, as well as being suitably embarrassed by what was going on with the father in the bar.
The Woman – Rachel Mellor

A small but absolutely vital role, and how great to see it not thrown away just because you only appear briefly. This was a superb characterisation – confident, sexy and suitably intimate with Willy with no sense of self-consciousness or inhibition, and you had a great laugh, which of course plays such an important sound and memory through the play.

With a great appearance, superb accent, and well-timed delivery, this was a memorable and effective portrayal, making the absolute most of both your scenes, and providing a suitably heart stopping moment when she reveals herself to Biff in the motel room. Well done on your commitment to this crucial role, and for playing it with sincerity and focus.

Jenny/Letta – Jenny Fletcher

Great work here at making a contrast between your two small roles, not only through appearance, but also with your attitude and delivery in each part.

Jenny was the efficient secretary, with a professional demeanour and good posture, and Letta looked attractive in her outfit, evidently up for a good time, but nicely confused by the situation she finds herself in with the father and sons. All in all, these may have been smaller roles, but they were still effective roles, as you brought them to life with focus, discipline and commitment.

OVERALL ACHIEVEMENT (or CONCLUSION)

An excellent understanding of the author’s intent.
Direction which shows skill, originality, sensitivity and creativity using all the theatrical tools of pace, focus, delivery, timing and rhythm.
Talented actors creating highly effective dramatic impact.
Evidence of teamwork and unselfish ensemble playing.
Actors who interact and react, and a production team who use all resources to create atmosphere and mood.

What else can I say? There are times when the confidence of everyone involved in a production is plain to see, and here it was evident in all aspects – the direction, the casting, the playing, the lighting and sound, and the set, props and wardrobe – all enhancing the script, and proving that, even in the smallest detail, “attention must paid”.

From the opening music to the closing curtain, there was thought, intelligence, focus and commitment from all concerned, making a rewarding and memorable night at the theatre, with some truly magical moments of
wonderful theatre.

I hope that where I have put some comments or criticisms, these are seen as constructive (and sometimes merely personal) thoughts to enhance, rather than anything that was lacking or underachieved.

Well done to everyone involved in this excellent production.

Also, a big thanks for looking after us so well, and I hope to see you all again soon.

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