

Production	Holmes and the Ripper
Society	Frodsham Players
Venue	Frodsham Community Centre
Type of Production	Play
Director	Iain Bennett
Written by	Brian Clemens
Review	26.11.24
Reviewer	Jake Powell

Frodsham Players were back at Frodsham Community Centre for their production of Brian Clemens' 'Holmes and the Ripper', directed by Iain Bennett. The set was absolutely fantastic. On two levels, with the stage area dressed as the interior of 221B Baker Street, with the floor in front of the stage being used for other locations. The level of attention to detail was amazing, and the set looked lived in, with a violin case and music stand, a fireplace that lit up, books strewn around the room, and scientific knick-knacks dotted around. On the floor level, there was a convincing brick wall (beautifully hand painted) with working street lamp stage left. There were a set of steps leading up to the stage central, used for the scene on the bridge. The pace in scenes was good, but the transitions could have been snappier. Iain's direction was very good, with each character being clearly defined. The blocking and staging of the scenes was very good, and the death scenes were tastefully done. The scene in the insane asylum was done very well, lit in green; it gave the feeling of being in an unclean place. Costumes were well thought through and suited each character. From the smartly attired Holmes, to the keys dangling from Mrs Hudson's waist, everything has been thought of.

Technical elements were well integrated into this production. Sound effects were of a good quality and cued well. The sound balance of these was spot on. The lighting was designed well with all areas of the playing space covered. The spotlight picking out Sir William Gull at the opening, with added smoke, created an atmosphere befitting the production. The greens of the asylum were good, as were the coloured lights on the wall representing the stained glass windows of the church.

Taking on the role of Sherlock Holmes was David Varley. David gave a gravitas to the role, and it was nice to see a more personable Holmes, as you saw him thinking about his first love. The awkwardness in the exchanges with Sophie's Kate as their relationship was beginning to blossom added to the character. This was a strong performance from David, who embodied the character well.

There was an interesting (and inspired) casting approach to Dr Watson, with the role reimagined as a woman, played here by Carole Shinkfield. Having a strong female as Sherlock's companion juxtaposed against the brutal murders of women taking place. There were strong moments in Carole's performance, which wouldn't have the same effect if played as a male character. The exchange with Saunders about the name of the woman murdered was poignant, and the knowing looks with Sherlock as he tried to woo Kate added some humour. This was a very good performance from Carole, and having Watson presented as a female character was most definitely worthwhile.

Sophie Flowers played the psychic, Kate Mead. This was a secure performance from Sophie, with excellent vocal clarity and diction. The trance scenes were very well done and Sophie reacted well to these visions. There was a good relationship formed with David's Sherlock.

David Leslie played Sir William Gull. This was a very good supporting performance from David. His diction and vocal clarity was top notch. From the ominous opening, through all the twists and turns, David gave a convincing performance.

George Jenkinson played John Netley. George's accent was generally good, as was his vocal clarity and diction. There could have been a more varied line delivery, which would help develop his character. George did work well with the rest of the cast.

Julia Burgess was delightful as Mrs Hudson, Sherlock's housekeeper. Julia's interactions with the other characters was very good. The moment where she was on her own and sat on Sherlock's chair gave a moment of light relief, which Julia relished.

Ian Lancaster appeared in a number of minor roles. From the Cockney Lamplighter, to the imposing Potter, to the conspiring Lord Salisbury; each character was different and that was down to Ian's excellent use of voice and posture.

Martin Stockdale played Sir Robert Anderson. Martin seemed tentative when delivering his lines. His vocal clarity was good and he had a good presence on stage.

Andy Wilson played two contrasting characters, the Stranger and Policeman. As the Stranger, he was suitably confusing going in and out of different mental states. His Policeman was completely different, as he bumbled along, not really knowing what he was doing.

Rosie Hannah-Wilson played a number of roles, including Saunders the Coroner, a Streetwalker and an Asylum Inmate. There was some good differentiation between these characters. Rosie's diction and clarity were very good.

Louise Doyle made an impact in the small, yet important role of Annie Crooks. Here she was distant and suitably obsessed with her doll, representing her child.

Carrie Bennett-Brown played Mary Kelly and an Asylum Inmate. Carrie was able to portray to fearful nature of Mary, showing her uneasiness around people.

Ellie Usher appeared as Bradbury and an Asylum Inmate. As Bradbury, Ellie was line assured and convincing as the art gallery owner.

Michelle Parrington was suitably brash and bawdy as Catherine Eddowes. There was a good energy to this performance. Michelle appeared again as an Asylum Inmate.

Martina Keith-Stewart appeared as a Beggar and Asylum Inmate. Martina added some humour to the production as the Beggar, conning Watson out of money.

Isaac Bright gave a confident performance as the News Seller. He was clear vocally, and helped move the story along as he shared the news about the latest murders.

Overall, this was a very good production. It was suitably atmospheric, the set was stunning, and there were some top-notch performances.

A big thank you to everyone at Frodsham Players for their kind invite and their hospitality.

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