

Society : Cygnet Players  
Production : A Bunch of Amateurs  
Date : 17 May 2025  
Venue : St Barnabas Church  
Report by : Matt Bentley

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[Show Report](#)

## General

*A Bunch of Amateurs* is a great choice of play for a community theatre company. It has a very funny premise and great characters that actors can sink their teeth into. It includes roles for a broad range of performers and is flexible enough to be staged in a variety of ways. This production by Cygnet Players made for a very pleasant, entertaining afternoon in Earlsfield.

## Direction

The most important part of making this show work is the characterisations, and here Co-Directors **Caroline Steersmith** and **Phoebe Fleetham** did a fantastic job. Work had clearly been undertaken with the cast to develop fully-rounded characters with complete inner lives, who were instantly recognisable and fun for the audience to spend time with. The relationships between each of them were strong and, with the exception of the American visitors, it genuinely felt like walking into a community hall full of people who had known each other as neighbours for a very long time.

Blocking was well-considered, telling the story with a great deal of clarity and ensuring that there was never any doubt as to where a particular scene took place. The establishment of a path for characters to walk from one locale to another was an excellent innovation that assisted with this, and the use of the performance space's existing features to pull off unusual scenes such as Jefferson's escape from the barn added an extra layer to the staging.

A couple of things to be mindful of are tone and pace. While this is a script with some excellent dialogue, there were moments where it felt a little flat due to a slower pacing of the delivery than it required. Additional energy would have lifted the piece as a whole and kept the dialogue flowing at a more natural pace. Scene changes were a particularly good example of this, with many of them featuring the opportunity for snappier transitions from one scene to the interlude speech and into the next scene. Reducing the length of musical breaks and improvised dialogue would have assisted here in getting to the action faster.

## Cast

The creative team assembled a top-notch cast for this show, and each performer was a delight to watch. Leading the ensemble-style cast was **Laura Harrison** in an excellent performance as Dorothy, the director of a very local production of *King Lear*. It's always difficult to play the "straight man", trying to keep a semblance of sanity while the wild and wacky characters around you threaten to tear everything down, but Laura achieved this with aplomb, even injecting the character with its own sense of quirkiness. Somehow, she managed to find some nuance in the script and played the arc of the character, ensuring that Dorothy's journey, including the development of her feelings for Jefferson, felt real.

The fascinating characters that comprised the community of Stratford St John were all too recognisable. **Mark Steersmith's** performance as the marvellously uptight Nigel was bone dry and pitched with

excellent comic timing throughout. Local hotelier Mary was played with gleeful delight by **Carole Stewart**, radiating an enthusiasm for theatre in general, as well as an infectious excitement over the village's international visitor. **Lewis Milsted** was understatedly hilarious as the much put-upon but always happy to help Dennis Dobbins. And **Kathryn Felton** brought the house down on multiple occasions as Lauren, in a transformation that made even some who know her well look several times to realise it was her in the role.

Into this sleepy village of colourful locals came Jefferson Steel, seeing **Jason Thomas** demonstrate the unwavering (for the most part) and utterly unearned confidence that only Hollywood stars can radiate. This performance ran a gamut of emotions from excitement, through dismay, indignation and bafflement, to the climax where he was shown to be a thoroughly broken individual. It's a tough ask for an actor, but Jason very successfully took the audience on a journey through the ridiculous and out the other side. In this, Jefferson was supported by his daughter Jessica, played with reassuring groundedness by **Emily Mark**. Her performance was a thoughtful blend of calmness and naivety, allowing Jefferson to show a more human side through their interactions.

The Ensemble members, comprising **Ian Green**, **Lissa Floris-Watkins** and **Rachel Parker** were also excellent with all three remaining thoroughly in character throughout, whether that be as constant set workers or an intimidating gaggle of reporters. The interstitial pieces of Shakespearean verse were all well delivered, and the sense of "fools" each getting to have a turn in the spotlight was a lot of fun.

### Production

Directing a show is tough, so it is always impressive to see directors take on production elements in addition to their creative duties. In this case the directors took on full Producer duties, which is a feat to be commended. The production was very cohesive, particularly given the very small crew numbers listed in the programme. One can only assume members of the Cygnets committee and the cast lent some assistance, but this doesn't alter the impressiveness of Caroline and Phoebe's achievements here.

### Costumes

This was a delightful wardrobe with a consistent colour palette, which allowed for the characters' personalities to be augmented through their outfits while maintaining a sense of community. This is no surprise given the involvement of not only Co-Director Phoebe, but also of **Jan Huckle** via their company **All Dressed Up Costumes**. All Dressed Up has been providing excellent costume design to both professional and amateur companies for years, which are always of a very high standard.

### Set & Props

The set for this show was created effectively, with a series of walls representing the rehearsal/performance space and furniture brought in to demonstrate a shifting of location for the few scenes not set in the barn. There was a little confusion, though, about whether the walls were to represent the set on the stage or the walls of the rehearsal space (which was mainly referred to as a barn, barring the odd moment it was called a church, but this was possibly a slip of the tongue). It did appear for the most part that the set represented the barn walls, as characters entered and exited from the door in the middle. However, they were constantly being stripped of paint, which indicated they were supposed to be flats, comprising part of a set. Or perhaps they were both? A little more clarity on this may have been useful.

Props were plentiful and well sourced. An excellent touch was the inclusion of a cast member dialling in to rehearsal and freezing, which was done using a pre-recorded film of **Joe Beecroft**. Unfortunately this didn't successfully take place at this particular performance, but a word should be said for the excellent idea and execution, which I am told went off without a hitch every evening.

### Stage Management

No stage manager is listed for this production which, given its complexity and the smoothness at which it ran, is a little surprising. No doubt this is due to a very competent cast and technical team, who worked together to ensure the audience received a slick show and felt as if they were in excellent hands from start to finish.

### Lighting & Sound

**Ian Philby** created a technical design for this show that met the play's needs while also contending with the difficulties of working in a non-traditional theatre space. At this particular performance, it was a shame that the lighting design couldn't be seen clearly due to the large volume of sunlight streaming through the church windows, but it was evident that the lights were creating a variety of moods and working with the set to represent a range of locales, as would have been evident at an evening performance. Sound was used well to cover the set changes, but it was unclear why there was so much silence before and after the set changes took place. This goes towards the comments on tone and pacing earlier in this report.

### Programme & Publicity

This was a well-designed programme, featuring cast bios, lovely notes from the Chair and the Co-Directors, and some excellent marketing photography by **Ruth Furber**. The layout is easy to follow and the font well-selected for legibility. The inclusion of the About NODA section makes it eligible for the NODA Programme Competition.

The marketing photography was also excellently utilised by **Tara Rogerson** and **Jack Kelly** in a comprehensive social media campaign which left no doubt in the minds of Cygnet's followers and friends that the show was happening. This also included some excellent dress rehearsal photography by **Adam Martin**, plenty of which made its way to Instagram during show week, but could have had further reach via other channels such as Facebook.

### Front of House

Cygnets created a welcoming, community feel in the church annex to greet audience members. Following the ticket check at the door, there was a children's creche set up in the bar area, friendly faces chatting at the bar's counter, and other committee members ensuring guests had programmes and raffle tickets. This created a pleasant atmosphere that continued through to the auditorium.

### Summary

This was a pleasant and entertaining production celebrating the community part of community theatre, both through its subject matter and its execution. Focus was clearly on the development of fully-rounded characters and their relationships, and the excellent performances across the company bore this out. While there were opportunities to explore a more vibrant tone and pace to this piece, it was nevertheless an enjoyable afternoon spent watching the fruits of a very talented bunch of community theatre practitioners.



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