

## LEISURE

# Three Sharpe plays for the audience to enjoy

**Deborah Heath reviews Three Sharpe Shorts at the Maltings Arts Theatre in St Albans.**

OVO promised their nearly full house a fun evening, staging three short plays by writer Andrew Sharpe. The anthology format is a great vehicle. It gives more opportunities to directors and actors in which a theatre company can explore a common theme.

If using just one writer's work, as in this case, we see development of that writer's style. Also, with a number of short plays to see, there is likely to be at least one piece to please everyone.

Playwright Andrew Sharpe is a former solicitor and his legal experience was very clear in the plots of the first two plays directed by Sarah Ferdinands. Each piece was about a man and woman but the set up, ages and relationships were extremely different.

The stage was set with three tables; one for each play. This reduced stage-setting time but as a downside, it was harder for the audience seated at the sides to see the two outer performances.

It also meant that actress Emma Wright, who played a different lead woman in each of the three plays, had some very quick costume and character changes. She managed these two tasks with real energy.

She was believable in all three roles, from the young sassy Tia in *Last Walk of Shame* to the middle-aged barrister in *The Uninvited Guest*. However, it was her portrayal of Kirsty, victim of a road accident, in *Meet Me at the Nightingale* which was the most powerful. Her recollection of her accident sent my heart pounding.

Malcolm Jeffries was Wright's sparring partner in *Last Walk of Shame*, a quick-fire power battle between two young people the morning after the night before.

The premise, a reversal of a traditional date rape, made a compelling story in which Sharpe's legal background was clear. I was disappointed that Sharpe made the conclusion supernatural. It was unnecessary and somewhat undermined what was otherwise a great, believable piece of theatre.

In *The Uninvited Ghost*, Wright

was joined by David Widdowson, showing a bad tempered middle aged couple at a crossroads in their marriage. The audience enjoyed recognisable comic moments such as bemoaning the use of boards rather than plates in restaurants.

Widdowson cleverly played chauvinist Oldridge with glimpses of vulnerability that showed how Rea fell for him 30 years ago. Once again, there was a bit of over-writing; these characters and the drama were so credible that they didn't need the extraordinary death of a child in the mix too.

*Meet Me at the Nightingale*, directed by Kat Rogers, was sublime. Elderly Harry, at the early stages of dementia (charmingly played by Paul Manuel), awaits his wife in their favourite cafe.

Here he meets Kirsty, who has just fallen off her bike. Through mutual help, a very sweet friendship blossoms despite their age difference. Although the twist at the end was predictable due to the opening sound effect, it was still very moving and this play was the highlight of my evening.

## 6 More art exhibition



The six artists who will showcase their work at an exhibition in Harpenden

### Six female contemporary artists are launching their first joint exhibition in Harpenden.

Their exhibition, *6 More*, can be viewed at the Pop Up Shop, Leyton Road, opposite Waitrose, from Monday, October 21 to Sunday, October 27.

Gill Ayre, Karin Friedli, Anne Hignell and Judith Moule will be presenting unique contemporary landscape paintings, Flea Cooke will show stylish textile art, and Paula Barnard-Groves will exhibit iconic sculptures.

The four painters, one textile artist and one sculptor came together over a year ago to support and encourage each other in their work. Karin Friedli said: "It is such a privilege to be part of this amazing group of artists."

"We have worked really hard together to improve our art and businesses, and at the same time had fun with lots of laughter and the occasionally cry."

"The support and mutual respect has been incredible."

"And now we are exhibiting together, which is so exciting."

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