

## TWO packs pub

Pub theatre came to West Meon on November 9, 10 and 11 in the form of Jim Cartwright's critically-acclaimed TWO, a joint production inspired by David Thomas who runs The Thomas Lord and directed by Mary Dawson who runs West Meon Theatre. TWO is a play set in a pub, so, for an authentic set, pop into your award-winning local.

It worked brilliantly, the two actors behind and in front of the bar, so close they could touch the audience. For the actors there is nowhere to hide, they are exposed and vulnerable. You've got to look the part and be word perfect if you want to convince.

Ask what TWO is about and you get all kinds of answers. Human relationships, lack of communication, loneliness, existentialism (yes, someone said that), sadism, hope and hopelessness, love and hate. It is all of these and more, not bad for a one-hour play.

As a result, TWO puts extraordinary demands on the two actors, who play 14 characters of wildly different ages and personalities and accents and costumes. Suzanne Hall and Mick Keegan, landlady and landlord for the night, were magnificent. They were working with a tautly-constructed play and a great script. But it's a script which takes some delivering, there's a lot of acting to be done.

TWO ensnares the audience, teasing them with humour and pathos. It's light and it's dark. It's witty and it's bleak. It made people laugh and it made some people cry, which says a lot about how well staged and acted this production was.

The relationship between the landlord and landlady dominates, the other characters serving to bring out the underlying tragedy which has infected their lives. They snap away at each other from the start and there's some pushing and shoving and toe-treading behind the bar. You sense the tension. As the plot climaxes you find out its cause.

As well as being a northern landlady, Suzanne Hall had to be young and old, submissive to a violent partner, dominant to a feeble partner, crushed by life and despairing, drunk and jealous, and barking mad. Oh, and in a range of accents. She delivered 'let me groom and coddle you' in a Welsh lilt that Dylan Thomas himself would have applauded. Totally convincing in every role. Outstanding.

Mick Keegan's range is extraordinary, his characters real. He played the cliché-ridden landlord – 'sip, swig and sup'; and a pitiful Lothario with the corniest chat-up lines you'll ever hear. He was a feeble man with a comb-over and a sadistic boyfriend, a lonely old man communicating with his dead wife, a duffle-coated loony and, yes, a credible little boy in shorts asking pathetically 'Is me dad here?'

This little boy triggers the climax of the play, releasing the couple's suppressed feelings. They go from expressions of mutual hate to guilt and blame at their own son's death, seven years ago to the day. It's poignant, even shocking. Finally, as the truth comes out and the tension is released, they can both say 'I love you', and the play ends.

The first night audience gave a standing ovation. Post-performance debate centred not on how good it was – everyone agreed it was masterly – but on how hugely the actors had added to the script through their fine interpretation of the characters.

Huge credit goes to Mary Dawson and David Thomas, two people prepared to try things new. Pub theatre was new and it worked. Demand for tickets outstripped supply, so the originally-planned two performances became three sell-out performances. A lot of people enjoyed pre-theatre suppers. And everyone sipped, swigged and supped their favourite tippie throughout the performance. A thought-provoking and memorable way to spend an evening. If this is pub theatre, let's have some more.

Drinks on the house for everyone involved.