

Ham & High

Thursday, November 1, 2012

La Gaffe's Bernardo serves up a gentle comedy

AUTUMN MUSIC
Pentameters Theatre
Hampstead
★★★★☆

As the evenings get chilly – some welcome Italian warmth comes to Pentameters – Italian music, Italian food, Italian wine – and even Italian language for the first five minutes of this play. Luckily, they take pity on the audience and lapse into healthy West Country English for the rest of the evening. The play is by one of Hampstead's characters – Bernardo Stella from La Gaffe Restaurant.

The early 60s in Italy was not a good place for the over-60s. Eugenio is 69, a widower and longing for some female company. His prudish family have no wish to see him with

another woman – they are already thinking of him as an old man. Particularly angry is his youngest daughter Roberta, who resents her father's apparent dalliance with an old friend, Maddalena (Linda Bardell) – a widow dressed in black but with mischief in her eyes. The dalliance is destined not to last long because of neighbours who deride him, calling him A Dirty Old Man.

Suitable companion

So he goes further afield and finds Isabella, a woman in her early 60s. She is still a virgin, having spent her entire life looking after her mother and father until they died. He finds her a suitable companion but she has a brother who has always thought of her as housewife and carer and tells her she is too old to change her ways.

This is a gentle comedy with Chris Beales as the charming hero surrounded by charmless characters who want to prevent his relationship with Isabella (Dot Smith) and just want him to behave like an old person – something he is not ready to do. Eugenio also acts as commentator on the action, taking the audience in his confidence about his feelings.

Other actors who each play several roles of friends and relatives are Albert Clack, Roger Sansom and newcomer Zeynep Sandi.

It is a friendly kind of evening with the added bonus of pasta which is cooked during act one and served in the interval.

The play is directed by Michael Friend with a heart-warming Italian set by John Dalton.
Until November 11.

Aline Waites