



Quartet

by Ronald Harwood

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Company

Cecily Robson
Reginald Paget
Wilfred Bond
Jean Horton

Vicki Hollings
Maurice Smith
John Fenner
Susi Walker

Director

Wendy Anderson

Set design

Maurice Smith, Michael Seeley

Lighting design

Sarah Cooper, Don Sykes

Sound design

Darren Scott

Lighting and sound operation

Loft Technical Team

Stage manager

Anne Dickinson

Assistant stage manager

Maggie Brayshaw

Wardrobe

The company

Properties

Tricia Spelman

Set construction

Loft Construction Team

Press and publicity

Helen Ashbourne

Front of House photographs

Jo Eales

Theatre technician

Tim Elmore

Synopsis of scenes

Act 1:

A June morning. Just before noon.

Interval

Act 2:

Scene 1 – The next day. Mid-morning.
Scene 2 – Three weeks later. Early morning.
Scene 3 – October 10. Early evening.

Quartet hurdle age's lyrical barriers

Quartet
The Loft Theatre, Leamington

QUARTET displays four strong performances of equally significant characters, each of whose stories contribute to the underlying theme of how poisonous old age can be.

John Fenner plays the promiscuous comedian Wilf, who still grieves for his late wife, while Susi Walker is the sophisticated Jean, who cannot come to terms with the loss of her musical talent.

Cissie, played by Vicki Hollings,

slowly falls victim to Alzheimer's, and Maurice Smith depicts Reggie, displaying his wish to see out his days in a select retirement home, along with his three friends, without self pity.

When the quartet are faced with the prospect of reproducing Verdi's opera Rigoletto, a task they once performed with great success in their previous lives as opera singers, they long for the talent they once had to return.

But the group discover there is another way to hurdle the lyrical barriers of their ageing talent –

one often used by many of today's pop stars. Directed by Wendy Anderson, the production at Leamington's Loft Theatre benefits from a well balanced cast who play off each other, with no one stealing the spotlight.

It is a heart warming and sensitive production which showcases the talents of four once celebrated careers, with a somewhat predictable ending, but nevertheless both entertaining and amusing throughout.

Pete Squires

REVIEW

QUARTET, The Loft Theatre, Leamington, until Saturday, Running time: Two-and-a-half hours. Matinee on Saturday, at 2.30pm.

THE final stop of a retirement home is the setting for this production of writer Ronald Harwood's humorous tale of four old, retired, opera singers.

Wilf, Cissie, Reggie and Jean are gearing up for one final gala performance – of Act III of Giuseppe Verdi's opera Rigoletto.

But there are more than a few twists and turns along the way as the cast discover things about themselves and each other and muse over the ramifications of getting older.

John Fenner is devilishly funny as amorous pensioner Wilf, while Vicki Hollings is superb as dotty Cissie – the object of Wilf's lust.

Maurice Smith is memorable as the under-stated Reggie and Susi Walker is glorious as the regal Jean, who is certainly not happy about growing older.

In 2003, Harwood received an Oscar for his screenplay for Roman Polanski's film, *The Pianist*, starring Adrien Brody.

This production may not quite earn that level of accolade but it's a well-acted, enjoyable production which is definitely worth a look.

★★★★★ Dean Valler



■ TWISTS AND TURNS... Maurice Smith (left) and John Fenner in a scene from Quartet.

Discovering the tragedy behind the laughter

Quartet, The Loft Theatre, until September 24.

"ART is meaningless unless it makes you feel" muses ageing opera star Reginald Paget in Ronald Harwood's play, while a few feet away his equally decrepit colleague Wilfred Bond is stuffing three socks down his tights.

The two are preparing for a concert at their retirement home, alongside their opposite numbers in a once great quartet Cecily Robson (Vicki Hollings) and the star Jean Horton (Susi Walker), whose finest performance has just

been reissued. Jean has arrived at the home, scandalising the stuffy Reginald (Maurice Smith), her first husband whom she walked out on many years ago, and refuses to sing when the reunion is put to her.

The suspense is not great and the twist is not much of a twist, so I will give it away: They decide to mime, inspired by the increasingly eccentric Cecily singing along to her past glories on her walkman.

The value of the play is in the interplay between the characters. John Fenner as Wilfred keeps the

laughs ticking over as a past-hisself-by-date *Gasanova* whose mind is all that is left of his libido. Jean Horton is convincing as a crashingly insensitive one time prima donna whose relationship with the stuffy, pompous Reginald gradually thaws.

Underneath each laugh the tragedy of each character's life becomes apparent, and Vicki Hollings' performance as a woman in the early stages of Alzheimers becomes progressively more touching and provides the play's most terrifying moment.



