

FAWLTY TOWERS

By John Cleese and Connie Booth
Directed by Wendy Anderson



*Perfectly formed
sitcom that lives
on in the minds
of comedy fans all
over the world*

**MONDAY 15 TO
SATURDAY 20 APRIL 2013**

Talisman Theatre & Arts Centre

Barrow Road
Kenilworth CV8 1EG
Box Office Telephone: 01926 856548
Website: www.talismantheatre.co.uk



Cast:

Basil Fawlty - Bill Davies
Sybil Fawlty - Jill Laurie
Manuel - David Draper
Polly - Aureilia Storey
Terry the Cook - Tim Eden
Major Gowan - Nevil Malin
Miss Tibbs/Lady Morris - Maureen Jones
Miss Gatsby/Third Inspector/Mrs Taylor - Cynthia Anderson
Lord Melbury - John Fenner
Danny Brown/Mr Walt/Ronald - Damian Storey
Mrs Wareing/Mrs Mackenzie/Quentina - Ann Hannon
Mr Wareing/Mr Carnegie - Mike Santos
Mr. Mackenzie/Second Inspector/Mr Higgins - Geoff Barker-Mountford
Mrs Mackenzie - Ann Hannon
Sir Richard Morris/First Inspector - Mike Grimes
Mr. Hutchinson/Mr Watson/Mr Taylor - Colin Ritchie

Director - Wendy Anderson

Designer - Tim Eden

Stunning performances in wonderfully funny play at Kenilworth theatre (Kenilworth Weekly News)

'Black Magic', said to be the basis of Basil and Sybil Fawlty's strange marriage, may also cast a glow over the affection we feel for the sitcom. Fawlty Towers, with protagonists Basil (Bill Davis) and Sybil (Jill Laurie), holds such a place in sitcom history that it's possibly both difficult and dangerous to recreate it.

Yet this is the Talisman's second go and their reprise (with three different episodes) is both wonderfully funny and elegantly recreated. There were only 12 episodes, and here are three of the best – A Touch of Class, The Hotel Inspectors and Basil the Rat.

Basil's snobbery underlies A Touch of Class. An advert in Country Life, an extravagance at £40, is supposed to raise the calibre of clients and true to form self-styled 'Lord Melbury' (John Fenner) arrives. But he's no Lord - and Manuel (David Draper) saves the day with a deft wallop with a bar stool.

The Hotel Inspectors, with a stunning performance from Colin Ritchie as the verbose spoon salesman Mr Hutchison, plays to the stresses of running a clean and efficient hotel ... mmmm. The enemy is ever at the gates. Nuff said!

Basil the Rat – my favourite - uses the same theme with wonderful performances from all the main cast. Polly (Aurelia Storey) takes care of the grieving Manuel as his banished pet 'Siberian Hamster' escapes among the cream crackers.

A word of praise for the set wouldn't go amiss: WOW would be it. This is a lovely evening spent with old friends. Five stars.

Jane Howard

Fawlty Towers (Elephant Jam ©)



It's a great formula. Find a hugely popular TV series of thirty or forty years ago, collect a bunch of actors who look something like the originals and get them to do an impression. Here we have three half hour episodes which few will not have seen at some time or other. Not any real acting involved, of course, but a promise of an evening of entertainment.

There are three well remembered characters from the original where some physical similarity is essential. Bill Davis seems about seven foot tall and has a manic instinct hard-wired into his DNA – Basil sorted. David Draper, short, confused, improbably dark-haired and sporting the sort of moustache that wowed them in the aisles when Hitler was on the comedy circuit in the 30s is a recognisable Manuel. Most successfully recreated is Sybil. Jill Laurie not only has the hair and voice pretty well nailed, but also has a repertoire of mood, stance and movement that does full justice to the original.

Elsewhere there are moments to enjoy. Miss Tibbs (Maureen Jones) and Miss Gatsby (Cynthia Anderson) have little enough to do, but make each second precious. Damian Storey offers three well defined 'likely lads' and John Fenner's crooked Lord Melbury was significant in making the first of the three plays the best.

Plenty of promise then, pity about the delivery. The evening simply became less funny once we had got over the pleasure of the identity parade. Basil never quite had the short fuse and danger of imminent explosion that John Cleese gave us. Some comic moments failed to deliver because of lack of clarity or precision in the timing. Some gags were so deliberately contrived that any pleasure in their realisation had gone. Where was the desperate invention to cover moments of potential embarrassment? Why was there not a gathering urgency as the story developed and became more improbable? The cast were clearly capable of meeting those demands and it can only be assumed that actors were left to 'sort it out' by themselves. Authoritative, competent, diagnostic direction would have made a real difference and, sadly, this can only be assumed to have been lacking.

If we are to make a judgement on the size of house then this has done well. Certainly the night that I was in, the theatre was close to full. Nevertheless I feel that I must be guided by the fact that laughs became fewer and less enthusiastic as the evening wore on. Relief that there was not to be a fourth episode was palpable.

In offering three stars I am steering a route between The Scylla of misplaced enthusiasm and The Charybdis of easy disdain for this theatre overtly aiming for the popular.

Dombey & Son

Another view



Fawlty Towers is one of the best loved and most timeless of British TV sit-coms. There must be few people in this country who have not seen at least once all twelve episodes that were made. The modern availability of TV programmes via the internet also means that a reproduction on stage cannot be with the aim of reviving a lost classic. Instead it forms an opportunity for us to indulge with an old favourite. There is little room for innovation here; depart far from the TV episodes in characterisations and the audience are likely to be disappointed.

So what are the chances of substituting for actors like John Cleese and Prunella Scales? Well, this production does surprisingly well in the face of this daunting task, helped undoubtedly by some of those key characters having already played the same roles when The Talisman previously performed three other episodes from the series. Bill Davis does a remarkably good job of reproducing Basil Fawlty's speech, mannerisms and expressions, although was a bit weaker in the manic moments and this did feel frustrating as time went on. Jill Laurie as Sybil Fawlty was also a good counterfeit and carried off her officiousness with ease, and her strident call of 'Basil!' and braying laugh were both very effective. Of the other 'regulars', David Draper's Manuel and Tim Eden's Terry reminded me most of their TV counterparts.

Three episodes were performed here, with intervals between, and there was freedom for a bit of interpretation of the 'guest' characters. In 'A Touch of Class', a con man under the guise of Lord Melbury (played with a suitable air of haughtiness by John Fenner), exploits Basil's snobbishness in an attempt to con him out of money and valuables. In 'The Hotel Inspectors', an obnoxious spoon salesman (played by a suitably pompous Colin Ritchie) is mistaken for a hotel inspector by Basil. And in 'Basil The Rat', Manuel's 'hamster' (played by one or more enormous glove puppets) goes on the rampage during a council food and health inspection.

All in all an enjoyable evening if you are happy to get into the spirit of the thing and accept that it won't necessarily match the original.

Hari Kitson

