



### Reviewer: Peter McGarry

Picture the scene. A dowdy sports club pavilion in which the very air is tinged with feelings of failure.

Are we talking lacklustre village cricket? Or love-all local tennis, perhaps? The last image to mind could well be women's bowling. Too insignificant, you say? Think again.

The ladies we meet here are on a long losing streak and see themselves as remnants of glories long past. But theirs is a far more important role – together this fabulous five make up a microcosm of the world of women.

To add to the sheer impudence of it all, the writer of this heady slice of female fortitude is a man, no less. Warwickshire playwright Mark Carey pitches boldly across the green to delve into the minds and manoeuvres of his mixed-up protagonists. And a generally delightful job he makes of it, with the Loft providing the stage for the play's premiere production.

The women's problems are instantly recognisable. With the season finale approaching and the likelihood of yet another drubbing by their dreaded all-conquering rivals, team captain Ronnie just isn't very good, Ursula and Fiona have husband troubles, Joan outrageously stirs trouble, and Jan obsessively stirs tea.

It all brews up into an outline of the very fabric of village life and relationships, with moments of striking honesty, sad revelation and richly comic absurdity.

Michael Rolfe's smart direction ensures fine performances all round, with just a few lapses in vocal projection. Wendy Morris is a wickedly funny Joan, devolving with flair into unashamed drunkenness and providing a perfect foil for Sue Moore's priggish and patronising Ronnie. The five players inter-act with considerable style on a Richard Moore-designed set which positively radiates an image of old-fashioned values lost, when even Morris-dancers are dying off.

It's astutely written and highly entertaining, and soundtrack songs by the late great Matt Monro are extremely effective. But the script wobbles into some over-statement towards the end.

And please, Mr Author and Mr Director, dispense with the final curtain sing-along. This is pure amateur panto which the rest just doesn't deserve.

### Review by Nick Le Mesurier

In these dark days we need some light relief, something that satisfies the heart and head without being overly fatuous or cynical.

We have it in the Loft's production of Mark Carey's new play, *Keeping Our End Up*.

In the village of Longfield Bishop things are not quite what they seem. The ladies' bowling club is as much a part of the establishment as the church or the pub. But as the ladies reveal the truths behind their apparently harmonious lives we see the tragedies as well as the comedy that makes them what they are.

Five fine actresses make up a strong cast that is brim full of character. Centre stage is Ruth MacCallum as Ursula Fewings. She acts as narrator, shining a little light into dark corners. Head of the team is Ronnie Palmer (Sue Moore), former magistrate who is losing her memory, slightly. Sam Harris plays Jan Broomfield, over-keen young school teacher obsessed by 'Urnie', her tea urn. Lesley Wilcox plays Fee McGregor, who works in a solicitor's office and suffers an abusive husband. Especially poignant is Wendy Morris's portrayal of Joan Right, dinner lady, whose daughter died in an accident some years ago and who has felt herself judged by the village and by Ronnie, who presided over the enquiry, ever since. Her caustic wit is the grit in the oyster. *Keeping Our End Up* neatly balances a sentimental vision of England with some very believable and often tragic stories. It's the stuff of soap opera, here rendered as beautiful as an English summer evening. The audience reacted with long and loud applause, as this play well deserved.





Keeping your eyes UP  
APR 2019

John

- AS a Bingo  
man, you seem  
to have found your  
calling!

Thank you so much  
Mike

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