

DUETS Theatre Review – The Sentinel – Thursday 14th October 2021

DUET, duo, twosome, partnership, couple: A performance or double act for two people where the performers have equal roles throughout the piece.

When attending a play entitled [Duets](#), we presume therefore that's exactly what to expect. How wonderful then to find that my first post lockdown, Stoke Repertory Theatre Players production actually gave me four duets for the one ticket price. Winner!

Duets is a quartet of short plays written by Peter Quilter. Each focuses on the world of relationships and love. A blind date with terrible clothing, a drunken divorce while on holiday in Spain, the trials of unrequited love and a third-time marriage attempt, despite a collection of bad omens.

It is a fabulously slick collection of couple's stories; cleverly directed by Rosemary Gresty who brought out many of the hilarious situation comedy aspects of these plays. I take my hat off to any director who can successfully guide performers to look beyond their lines and play for laughs, a true art. There were some very special moments, brilliantly executed through meticulous direction.

Blind Date saw couple Jonathan and Wendy, played by [Derek Yeomans](#) and [Chris Lockett](#), meeting for the first time after answering an ad in a singles column. The nervous and quirky couple shared their experiences of love and life with fantastic one-liners and excellent comic timing.

Secretarial skills, featuring [Sarah Stockdale](#) and [Philip Jackson](#), is about a secretary and her boss, who clearly shared a great rapport as they bickered like a real couple and yet were not. Why? He is gay and she has a longing to be his life partner. With much camp innuendo, Philip portrayed a subtle character who, despite his counterpart's best efforts, was never to be swayed from his life's journey. She on the other hand was to do everything she could to make their relationship more than just business.

The Holiday, performed by [Robert Lawton](#) and [Dawn Huxley](#), saw a couple intent on divorcing while on holiday in Spain. A drunken flirtatious wife, a more than sensible husband and a lot of biscuits made for an entertaining glimpse into a couple still behaving as a couple even though their relationship was at an end. All of the typical 'couple-like' behaviours were played with humour and the many comedy moments made it a charming piece.

Finally, the double act performing Bride-To-Be were [Simon Bland](#) and [Emma Stanway](#). Stanway played three-time bride Angela, desperately being encouraged by her brother Toby (Bland) to consider what she is about to embark on while faced with numerous signs it isn't such good idea. Without offering any spoilers as to the outcome, both actors did tremendously well to embrace the hysterical situations. Even the threat of wedding day rain couldn't dampen their performances.

When presenting four plays in one evening there are obvious staging challenges. These were met with great success as the technical team and stage crew subtly re-crafted the stage after each performance, with location suggestions transporting us to our next comedic port of call.

This wonderfully funny collection of plays is definitely worth leaving the comfort of your sofa for. I left the theatre thoroughly entertained.

Duets runs until Saturday at the Stoke Repertory Theatre. Book at <https://stokerep.info/book-plays/>

LIZ TALBOT