

Bath-based play up to EODS' usual standard

Review of *The Rivals*, performed at the Italian gardens by EODS, by Roger Paine

Richard Brinsley Sheridan's *The Rivals*, written when he was 23-years-old, is one of only a handful of 18th century plays that continue to be produced. With the plot less important than the people, this highly satirical play is a thinly disguised send up of the playwright's own experiences. Yet by making each character larger than life, contemporary audiences can still identify with them.

This production with original music, well-chosen costumes, hairstyling and properties, is up to EODS' usual high standard.

Set in fashionable Bath, the play revolves around a group of well-heeled chattering classes, abetted by their conniving servants, embroiled in romance and intrigue to attain the partner of their choice. Lydia (Lauren Backler) and Julia (Florence Chisholm) are expertly cast as the woo-able young maidens. As are their suitors, Captain Jack Absolute (Adrian Samuel), Faulkland (Ian Tingley) and Bob Acres (Philip Visick).

The jealous eccentricities displayed by Faulkland are straight out of *Fawlty Towers* and the foppish extravagances of Acres echo those of Mr Humphries in *Are You being Served?*

As their elders, Sir Anthony Absolute (Nicholas Reynolds) is a lookalike Stephen Fry in *Blackadder*, whilst Sir Lucius O'Trigger (Stewart Wiseman) would not be out of place in *Father Ted*. Mrs Malaprop (Jenny Lloyd Lyons), the play's endearing character who has given her name in English language to using misplaced words, is a convincing ringer for Hyacinth Bucket in *Keeping Up Appearances*.

Although each actor, including those in the supporting roles, displays spot-on characterisation, it might have been prudent for director Sandra Tomlinson to have judiciously wielded a hard pruning knife to portions of the script. This production might then be more of the modern comic burlesque which its classical reputation so richly deserves.