



Be inspired by amateur theatre

## National Operatic & Dramatic Association London Region

Society : Shinfield Players Theatre  
Production : A Bunch of Amateurs  
Date : Wednesday 4<sup>th</sup> March 2026  
Venue : Shinfield Players Theatre  
Report by : Gordon Bird

### Show Report

Owing to the regular NODA representative being unavailable I was very kindly invited to review this show. I know this society well and enjoyed the evening's entertainment of *A Bunch of Amateurs*, a comedy by Ian Hislop and Nick Newman, that follows Jefferson Steel, a fading Hollywood action hero who mistakenly agrees to play King Lear in a small Suffolk village, believing it to be the prestigious Stratford-upon-Avon.

**DOROTHY NETTLE (Sandra Miall)** – Sandra delivered a warm yet steely portrayal of the beleaguered director of the Stratford Players. As an experienced actress, she brings a reassuring presence to every scene, even when the occasional line is dropped. Her diction and projection were excellent throughout. As we have come to expect from Sandra, this was a confident, secure performance.

**NIGEL DEWBURY (Neil Padgen)** – Neil delivered a superb performance as the solicitor and self-appointed leading light of the Stratford Players. Pompous, stuck-up, and entirely self-regarding, he convincingly embodied a man who believes he should play every leading role. In less capable hands the character could easily have been overplayed, but Neil struck the perfect balance. His line delivery was excellent, with every word clearly heard.



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**MARY PLUNKETT (Nadine Masseron)**- What a delightful role! As the owner of the Rectory bed and breakfast, she delivered a charming comic performance—jolly, generous, and an unabashedly devoted fan of Jefferson Steele. I particularly enjoyed the small touches: checking herself in the mirror before taking his breakfast order, and quickly diving into her handbag for makeup upon learning he would be arriving at rehearsal. These moments added warmth, humour, and lovely character detail.

**DENIS DOBBINS (Dan Walford)** – Dan delivered a strong performance as the reliable handyman and village Mr Fixit, completely starstruck by Jefferson and eager to become his one-man entourage. It’s a lovely role, and Dan played it effectively with some great moments of humour—especially the way he produced his hi-vis jacket at every hint of a health-and-safety issue. Although his accent wavered occasionally, it was never distracting and actually added an extra layer of character.

**JEFFERSON STEELE (Peter Collins)** – As the fading Hollywood star—arrogant, insecure, brash, gauche, demanding, vulnerable, yet ultimately aware of his own absurdity—Peter delivered a performance with real depth and understanding. His energy throughout was excellent, with several standout moments. The strongest by far was his portrayal of “Lear,” where he demonstrated complete command of his craft. The shift from his real-life persona to the King Lear performance was clear and compelling, and Peter was truly outstanding in the role.

**JOURNALISTS (Barbara Richards, Keith Stoneman)**

This duo delivered their cameo roles effectively, appearing at the opening press conference and later providing off-stage questioning. Their contributions were confident, with good attack and clear diction.



Be inspired by amateur theatre

### **LAUREN BELL (Sara Shuttleworth)**

Sara gave an honest and engaging performance as the marketing executive, former physiotherapist, and sponsor's wife. She demonstrated good stage presence and excellent vocal delivery, building strong rapport with her fellow actors.

### **MINSTRELS (Mark Richardson, Elisabeth Richardson)**

Several scene changes were covered by three minstrels who performed songs ranging from the 1602 *For the Rain it Raineth Every Day* to the 1990s *Livin' la Vida Loca*. Each interlude was amusing, well-rehearsed, and well-sung, with clear relevance to the plot. However, despite their quality, the inclusion of the minstrels felt slightly out of place within the overall production.

### **JESTER (Martyn Washbourne)**

Martyn was exceptionally entertaining throughout all the scene-change sketches. He struck the perfect balance of cheekiness and playful energy without distracting from the singers. His interaction with them enhanced each segment, and his costume added to the fun of the scenes.

### **JESSICA STEELE (Benita Venables)**

Benita portrayed Jefferson's teenage daughter with just the right mix of moodiness, stropiness, and determination. Her volume was strong, and her American accent was convincing, though a few words were occasionally hard to hear. Overall, this was a confident and believable performance.

## **CREATIVES**

**Director (Lucy Watkins, assisted by Maggie Smith)**



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This was Lucy's first directing role, and she should be very pleased with her efforts. Entrances and exits were crisp, the characters were well defined, and the movement never felt contrived. I particularly enjoyed the contrast created for the "play within the play" —the mood, setting, and characterisation all shifted beautifully for the King Lear scenes, which were a highlight of the evening. Each performance in these moments was outstanding.

A couple of small criticisms: I would have preferred to see the reporters in the opening scene facing the audience, as they had their backs turned throughout and were not well lit on the carpeted area. Secondly, although enjoyable, the minstrels did not feel necessary and their entrances and exits slowed the pace. Overall, however, this was a very well-directed production, bringing out the comedy wonderfully. Congratulations.

### **Wardrobe (Debbie Wheeler & Cate Naylor)**

This was a busy show for costume, covering minstrels, Shakespearean attire, and the main play's characters. Everything suited the production perfectly. The King Lear costumes were particularly good, looking authentic and well matched to each role.

### **Make-up**

All faces were clearly visible under the stage lighting, and the make-up felt appropriate to both the setting and the period.

### **Properties (Graham Smith, Corrine Bowler & Charlie Clark)**

A strong and varied selection of props helped dress both the set and the characters. I especially liked the range of press microphones at the start, the amusing hi-vis jacket, the king's throne, and the thoughtful dressing of the rectory. The detail in the barn set was excellent.

The camera flashbulb effect worked well but was quite startling when aimed



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toward the audience; positioning it differently may have improved the moment. Overall, the props were well chosen, relevant, and never distracting.

### **Set Build (Tim Howling, Di Capel, Natalie Clark, Clive Dolby, Steve Toon & Yvonne Mitchell)**

The set genuinely looked like a barn—very well constructed, with a split door mid-stage right and a sliding door upstage. The upstage door clearly needed to be sturdy, as it withstood the dramatic slamming in Act Two! Downstage left served as Mary's B&B dining room, complete with its own entrance. The décor throughout was thoughtful, and the working chandelier was a particularly nice touch.

### **Stage Manager (Sam Turner)**

There were numerous scene changes across both acts, shifting props to establish different locations. Each transition was handled quietly, efficiently, and professionally by Sam and her crew (**Charlie Clark, George Apap, Teddy Secular Clark, and SPT members**).

### **Lighting & Sound (Pete Ashton & Tom Grady)**

This was a busy show in terms of lighting and sound cues due to the number of scenes. Generally, cues were executed perfectly, though on the evening I attended there were a few late lighting cues. The smoke-alarm lighting effect was very effective.

Overall, the sound quality was strong, though the SFX for the laptop character joining via Skype played from behind me rather than the stage and was noticeably too loud.

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**Front of House (Peter Ashton & Heidi Ashton with members & friends of SPT)**

As always, the front-of-house and bar teams were friendly and welcoming, contributing to a thoroughly enjoyable evening.

**Programme (Sandra Miall)**

A very detailed and colourful eight-page programme priced at £2. It included NODA information, upcoming shows, a well-organised cast and creatives list (helpfully positioned at the centre spread), and interesting cast biographies. The photographs were clear, high-quality, and well presented.

Thank you for inviting me to your show. I hope the remainder of the run was a great success.



Gordon Bird

NODA Youth Advisor - London Region