

ON STAGE by ELIZABETH WIGHT

"Stepping Out" is tremendous fun! This lighthearted comedy presented by City Players at the National Theatre until 16th June is directed by Gerry Tebbutt with the confident touch of the professional. He is a director in whom Nairobi audiences can have every confidence after his success in previous years with "How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying" (1988) and "Godspell" (1989), both for City Players.

"Stepping Out" is best described as a comedy with music. There are no songs but plenty of opportunity for the lively cast to show their terpsichorian skills (or lack of them!).

The story is simple. A group of aspiring amateur tap-dancers meet weekly in a local hall. For at least one it is a compulsion, she is *hooked*. The situation where one steps into another world for one hour a week without the need to project oneself more than one wishes will be familiar to any who have attended night-classes in the anonymity of a large city. Into the happily humdrum group comes newcomer Vera. Previous to her arrival they were just there, accepting each other at face value, making no demands. Vera, the archetypal "do-gooder", smugly self-satisfied, attempts to improve the lot of those around her.

She is in direct contrast to the abrasive Maxine, gauche Andy, nervous Dorothy, loudly vulgar Sylvia and cynical Rose. With Lynne, who is *awfully nice* but rather colourless and the hapless single male member these make up the class which is led by Mavis, played with a nice edge of weary professionalism by "imported star" Jenny Logan.

The comedy comes mainly from the exchange of small talk about their ordinary everyday world and they become very real people. We never meet but we get to know the dull husband, the brash teen-age son, the loneliness and the heartache that are part of their lives and warm to the good humoured acceptance of this and each other. It is to their credit that each player stays totally in character throughout so that the audience can fully identify with them.

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The prospect of taking part in a Charity Concert steps up the action. Tempers begin to fray, personalities become more distinct and more demanding. We anguish with them and there was an audible sigh of relief from the audience when they nearly got it right at the Dress Rehearsal.

Jenny Logan as Mavis holds her group together with forceful energy. She manages to convey both world weariness and hopeful optimism in turn with total conviction. She is, as she says in character "one step ahead of the class".

Vera is played by Ruth Sherwin, last seen at Braeburn Theatre as Helena in "A Midsummer Night's Dream". She brings to the role both grace and a cloying, simpering innocence central to much of the humour in the play.

Lesley-Anne McGuinness who plays Maxine has a strong stage presence. She moves beautifully and has a fine sense of comedy. It is hard to believe that she has appeared to Nairobi audiences only once before (as Jill in "Mother Goose") in the six years since leaving Mombasa.

Together with Vera they are splendid foil for the understated performance of Eleanor Stevens as Andy, whose lack of confidence is perhaps only matched by the diffidently clumsy Geoff played with sensitivity by Ian Barton. Both these players have delighted audiences many times before in Nairobi.

It is almost invidious to single out any one of this lovable team, all contribute so well to the enjoyment of the evening. But all are nearly upstaged by Wendy Penrose as Mrs Fraser, the cantankerous pianist for the rehearsals. Wendy who has appeared many times for NCP and for Phoenix and Lavington Players is a versatile artiste who now turns in a wonderfully comic character portrayal which rightly drew the loudest applause at this particular performance.

City Players' policy of importing professionals from the U.K. may indeed pay dividends in the confidence that Nairobi audiences have that the high standards the Players achieve will be maintained. But after a show like this, where each member of the cast plays their part so well we are left amazed at the wealth of talent we have in this city.