



## **Eastbourne College: Blue Stockings - a remarkable achievement!**

As a NSTA representative, I had the pleasure of attending *Blue Stockings* at Eastbourne College on Saturday, 7th December 2024. Under the superb direction of Jim Russell, the production was an impressive testament to the hard work and dedication of both the cast and the creative team. With a stunning set designed by Phil Poole, a highly attentive costume team, and Amelie Chavelier serving as the movement coach, the production left a lasting impression on the audience. Props supervisor Maya Belle also played a key role in ensuring that the technical elements were seamlessly integrated into the show.

*Blue Stockings*, Jessica Swale's first full-length play, is set at Girton College, Cambridge, in 1896. The title references the term "bluestockings," used disparagingly for intellectual women. The story follows four talented female undergraduates campaigning for the right to earn formal degrees like their male peers. It explores themes tied to the late 19th-century feminist movement, including education equality, sexual autonomy, and political enfranchisement. Developed in 2012 at the National Theatre Studio and the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts, the play premiered at Shakespeare's Globe in 2013.

The energy of the entire cast was consistent and impressive throughout the performance. Each actor brought their character to life with authenticity, and the balance between the comic and dramatic elements of the play was skilfully managed. The play's wit and humour were communicated excellently, while the more poignant, romantic moments were delivered with great sensitivity.

Noah, in the role of Ralph Mayhew, was particularly captivating. His exuberant expressiveness and infectious energy were key to his portrayal of the young man's earnest affection for Tess, played by Poppy. Noah skilfully captured Ralph's innocence and longing, while Poppy brought depth and complexity to Tess, whose inner turmoil and ambition shone through in every scene. The chemistry between the two actors was palpable, and their performances were undoubtedly some of the most engaging moments of the production.

Oscar's portrayal of the emotionally complex character of Will was also noteworthy. His use of voice and body language in the scene with his sister Maeve was particularly moving. The exchange between the siblings about their late mother was a powerful moment in the play, with Oscar and his co-actor delivering a scene that resonated deeply with the audience. Both actors conveyed the tension, grief, and unresolved emotions of the moment with great subtlety, demonstrating the depth of their craft.

Another key moment in the play was the exchange between Will and Tess, which was brought to life by Neffion and Poppy. Their performances showed clear character



development, with both actors demonstrating excellent control over their respective roles. Neffion's portrayal of Will's frustration and growing awareness of Tess's ambitions added significant emotional weight to the scene, while Poppy's sensitive portrayal of Tess made for an engaging and emotionally-charged interaction.

The lighting and set design were nothing short of stunning. The production made excellent use of lighting to establish mood and time period, enhancing the atmosphere of late 19th-century Cambridge. The set was meticulously detailed, and the attention to period accuracy helped ground the play in its historical context. Every element of the set seemed purposeful, contributing to the overall immersive experience of the production.

The costume design was equally impressive, with the wardrobe choices fitting both the characters' personalities and the time period. From the formal attire of the male characters to the more tailored, academic dresses worn by the women, the costumes added authenticity to the production and supported the actors' performances.

The back-stage organisation and front-of-house coordination were flawless. The seamless transitions between scenes, smooth prop changes, and professional stage management all contributed to a well-orchestrated experience for the audience. The front-of-house team was equally efficient, ensuring that the audience felt welcomed and well looked after from start to finish.

Overall, Eastbourne College's production of *Blue Stockings* was a remarkable achievement that showcased the talents of both the cast and crew. The performances were engaging, the technical elements were beautifully executed, and the direction brought a fresh vibrancy to this historical play. A special mention should be made of the entire creative team and the dedicated backstage crew and front of house team who ensured that everything ran smoothly.

This production was not only an excellent representation of Jessica Swale's poignant script, but also a testament to the hard work and collaboration of all those involved in bringing it to life. Well done to everyone for a truly enjoyable and memorable theatre experience.

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