

British Theatre Guide

News, reviews, features and podcast on theatre across the UK

Chalet Lines

Lee Mattinson

Bush Theatre in association with Live Theatre

Live Theatre, Newcastle

13 September–6 October 2012

Families, eh? Make a list of every cliché about them, look closely at the list, think about them, and you very soon come to the realisation that they're all true. Which is why, of course, writers of all kinds find families such fertile fields.

Can Lee Mattinson's *Chalet Lines* find anything new to say? Or, perhaps, find a new way to say it?

What he has done is show us four generations of the women of a single family as they celebrate important occasions over five decades in the same chalet at Butlins in Skegness.

We start in the present day when nana Barbara (Ann Ridley) celebrates her 70th birthday with daughter Loretta (Sharon Percy), the organiser of the event, and her daughters Abigail (Viktoria Kay) and Jolene (Sammy T Dobson) as they await the arrival of Loretta's younger sister Paula (Jill Dellow).

Then we move back to 1996 as Loretta and Barbara gatecrash Paula's hen night, then further back to 1961 and Barbara's wedding day where we meet her mother, Edith (Donald McBride). Finally we return to the present day as the birthday celebration falls apart.

The family exhibits the usual mixture of love and dysfunction and Mattinson finds both humour and poignancy in their interactions. In fact there is a great deal of humour here: Mattinson has a good ear for dialogue and gives us some great one-liners which brought roars of laughter from the audience.

However the characters do tend to be one-dimensional, being types rather than true individuals, and this puts quite a burden on director Madani Younis and his cast who have to find the depth of character which is often only implied by the text.

In this Donald McBride—why they cast a man in the part I'm not sure, but it works very well—has the easiest task as he is playing someone from a different era, a woman whose inner and outer selves are one and the same, rigidly conforming to her vision of social-climbing respectability at an age when any vestige of youthful rebellion is long forgotten.

A comparatively straightforward task, too, for Jill Dellow. She gets Paula's desire to distance herself from the crudity and loudness of her sister and her inability to stand up to that in-your-face roller-coaster exactly. Her facial expression often says it so well!

Roller-coaster is the right word for Loretta whose full-on aggression is captured well by Sharon Percy but the underlying unhappiness is too deeply buried. This is partly the fault of the writing and

partly of the direction which seems to have focused on her relentless domineering at the expense of light and shade.

Viktoria Kay really nails Abigail, the most complex of the characters. Making full use of body language and a very mobile face, she expresses what the text doesn't say and by the end we feel we have really come to know her.

The piece would benefit from some significant pruning and tighter direction. As it stands it is entertaining and enjoyable, with some good laughs and a touch of poignancy, but there is more there waiting to be brought out.

Reviewer: [Peter Lathan](#)