

Political farce may well be staple element at Westminster but it has never been an important aspect of British theatrical tradition. European theatre has always been more politically inclined and Dario Fo is one of its leading exponents. Given the innate conversatism of the British theatre-going public it was a brave choice on the part of Bovingdon Players to decide to stage "Can't Pay? Won't Pay!" as their current production.

And yet what a refreshing production it proves to be. Given a quietly assured direction from John Entwistle and the enthusiasm of the ensemble and the rich thread of humour running through the piece the evening provides both entertainment and many thought-provoking moments.

The openings for political stridency and harangues provided by the author are handled deftly and delicately in the main. The political comment underpins the structure of the play but politics is never allowed to overwhelm the action.

A cast of relative newcomers has been assembled and they respond to the challenge with verve and freshness. Alex Simpson plays the leading female character, Antonia, and displays a pleasant understanding of the role of the central character in farce, which is to keep the action moving briskly without appearing to dominate events. As the shrewd, quick-thinking Antonia Ms Simpson is an energetic pivot for the frenetic action, ably assisted by the poker-faced Jane Bryson as Antonia's best friend, Margherita. This is Jane's first major role for Bovingdon but the amusing assurance of her performance will ensure that this is the first of many.

Experience is provided by Iain King in the role of Antonia's husband, Giovanni. Iain has taken a number of major parts for Bovingdon in the past and his portrayal of the hapless Giovanni, constantly and completely outwitted by Antonia, is a

delight. His accomplice, Luigi, is equally inept and is played with bewildered conviction by Mike Allaway. The other major roles are handled by Lionel Elton who draws on previous directing experience to add presence and credibility to the characters he portrays. Also in a very strong cast are Matthew Rose and Martin Pearce.

The play is set in mid-seventies Milan and is studded with Italian references which presents obvious problems to a British amateur production. Director John Entwistle decided to keep most of the references but to avoid the inevitable pitfalls of accent. One consequence was that the stage setting became a mundane depiction of a British working-class living-room rather than an Italianesque environment. It works surprisingly well and is a tribute to the work of the team under the control of Mike Aylward.

The political content can be overstressed. More relevant is the battle of the sexes. Antonia and Margherita prove superbly capable of manging anything, particularly their menfolk, and in the process demonstrate that men are truly the dominant sex if only because women are wise enough to let them think that way.