



**DON'T MENTION THE WAR:** Ben Brinnicombe, as Basil Fawlty, embarrassing his German guests as Workington Playgoers recreate on stage one of the most famous moments from the Fawlty Towers TV series, with Mike Savage as a German guest; Fran Smith as a German visitor and Derek Thompson as the Major

# Faultlessly funny Fawlty Towers from Playgoers

REVIEW: Fawlty Towers, Theatre Royal, Workington. Workington Playgoers Club

THERE have been a million laughs down the years, but perhaps nothing to match this. Fawlty Towers, in the hands of a wonderful cast of 18, strikes superb comedic pitch to celebrate the 75th anniversary of the Playgoers Club of Workington.

From the skilled direction of Geoff Hool through sound, lighting, properties, costumes and wigs, this gem at the Theatre Royal is an exemplar nonpareil of team work – but nobody would

disagree that the stellar performance comes from six-foot-four-inches-tall Ben Brinnicombe in the role of Basil Fawlty, the owner-manager of a seaside hotel where only confusion and despair upsets the daily rhythms of lunacy and insult.

Even though Basil, Sybil, Manuel, Polly and the gang first entered our living rooms an amazing 35 years ago, I suspect that most followers of Playgoers will automatically compare this live production to the BBC originals. They won't be disappointed.

Let's face it, the originals were so good that it would be folly to try to wring something new from the scripts of John Cleese and Connie Booth (Basil

and Polly the maid in the TV series).

Brinnicombe has a remarkable physical similarity to the John Cleese of the 1970s, and for a man who hasn't acted for eight years he produces a performance and a half as the uniquely mad Basil: arrogant, bored, gullible, hen-pecked, a secret gambler and with a temper slightly shorter than his moustache.

You'll have to wait until late in the production until concussion-affected Basil does his famous impersonation of Hitler goose stepping over Europe for the benefit of his distraught German guests, but it's well worth the wait.

You couldn't fault Sarah De-

lorne as maddening Sybil, veteran Ian Mitchell as Manuel, the feckless head waiter from Barcelona, Anne Bowmer as Polly, Jenni Rushton as the deaf and accusatory Mrs Richards or Mike Savage, who got through a lot of work in three different roles.

For classic characterisations of the Scottish aristocracy and the English officer class, there's memorable stuff from Peter Inglis (Lord Melbury) and Derek Thompson (Major Gowe) in a piece of theatre which moves at breathless and captivating pace.

Fawlty Towers closes its six-night run tomorrow. Call the box office on 01900 602122.

PHIL CRAM