



## ROSE BOWL ADJUDICATION

Name of Company: **Amateur Players of Sherborne**

Name of Production: **She Stoops to Conquer**

Venue: **Sherborne Studio Theatre**

Date: **3<sup>rd</sup> December 2025**

Adjudicator: **Tash Moore**

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This well-known 1773 farce by Oliver Goldsmith was a fantastic choice for this society's charming venue where the audience are close to the action and therefore the numerous asides were delivered most effectively. The style of comedy, variety of characters and timeless themes explored continue to entertain modern audiences with a classic tale of mistaken identities. The director evidently knew the play inside out, took artistic licence with confidence and clearly had empowered the company to craft a series of likeable, entertaining characters. The piece moved without hesitation and everyone on and off stage assumed their roles with authority. This APS production of *She Stoops to Conquer* proved to be a highly entertaining piece of theatre that was enjoyed by all in attendance; congratulations to everyone involved.

### SET & STAGING

The opening scene was set in Mr Hardcastle's country house and the set design as realised by Adrian Hole, Mark Lambert, Robert Yeo and John Crabtree delivered this location beautifully. A feature fireplace sat stage left with a chair in the downstage corner that was frequently used to position characters closer to the audience to deliver asides. A shelf was fixed above the fireplace and a painting of a hunting scene sat above this. Either side of the fireplace hung bellows and a bedpan, with a poker and logs positioned on the hearth. A curtained entrance upstage left was frequently used throughout the production. The curtain was a heavy red and cream paisley fabric and two pictures were hung on the walls upstage of the entryway. A show cloth displaying gold text hung centrally which was a lovely detail and once removed the back wall was revealed, displaying eight prints that were referenced as part of the dialogue. A green armchair with a matching footstool, a wooden chair and a side table were all positioned centre stage which much of the action taking place in and around this area when in the house location. A doorway to another part of the house featured upstage right and the flat stage right was decorated with wood panelling along with a painting of a man in a periwig. A trolley was positioned downstage right and two treads led up to the stage from the auditorium to facilitate entrances and exits made here. A sturdy-looking mock beam hung across the back wall to add to the overall aesthetic and an ornamental chandelier hung centrally above the stage. The scenic art (delivered by the construction team, along with support from Jane McKenna) here and throughout the production was of the highest quality, with the mottle and daub effect bringing the various flats into one unified picture.

The blocking throughout by Director, John Crabtree made the most of the set design and in particular, the pace of the piece was carefully considered as the entrances and exits overlapped one another to maintain the farcical energy throughout. As incidental music started playing, three servants brought on various items including two candlesticks that were placed on the shelf over the fireplace, boots set downstage left, four goblets placed onto the trolley and a cloak draped over the armchair. This gentle activity made for an enjoyable pre-show that brought the setting to life and once complete, the lights were dimmed and the show cloth was removed. Hardcastle positioned himself in his armchair, reading a newspaper whilst Mrs Hardcastle moved around him in a state of distress. Tony skipped on from upstage right to journey across the stage to the downstage left chair where he sat to put on his boots. When Constance entered, she perched on the footstool to speak with Kate and in this scene the two girls were nicely established as close confidants.

The two outside flats were closed in to create the alehouse for Scene 2, again with exceptional scenic artwork across the bottom of these to denote bare brick details. A poster declaring the '*rules of the inn*' was positioned on a wall and a shelf accommodated lanterns, bottles and tankards. The proprietor entered through a central opening between the flats whereas the customers entered through the central aisle of the auditorium. Tony sat on a bench placed downstage right and behind him a screen had been positioned as an additional feature to enhance the setting. An entertaining performance of Mike Stanley's '*Alehouse Song*' was delivered with vigour with one cast member accompanying on an accordion. This was a memorable moment as the company worked together to create a lively atmosphere, revelling in their comradery.

Scene 3 opened with business from the hapless servants who did their utmost to take their master's advice on board, but ultimately failed miserably. This group of characters were crafted nicely and lifted various scenes throughout the production. Their laughter was infectious as they fell about remembering the "*story of the Old Grouse in the gun-room*" and even Hardcastle could not help but join in with their merriment. Marlow swiftly made himself at home as he removed his shoes and relaxed into Hardcastle's armchair and later joined Hastings to stand downstage centre as they discussed his relationship with Constance. Once Hardcastle entered, Hastings slouched in his armchair and read his newspaper whilst Marlow took to the downstage left chair to address the audience directly. Hardcastle stood between the other two characters as he made several attempts to share his story about "*five thousand men*" with little success. The pace and energy throughout this scene were fantastic and the direction made the most of every opportunity to drive the humour whilst maintaining clarity in the narrative and supporting characterisations. I also really enjoyed the choice for Hastings to 'feed' a tongue-tied Marlow his lines as he first met with Kate. The distance between their opposite positions worked well, as did Marlow's awkwardness as he leant on the fireplace and then on the back of a chair.

When Tony and Constance re-entered, they stood together by the fireplace and the mother-son relationship developed during this exchange. When Tony entered with the jewels, it was fun to keep Kate on stage to throw him obvious looks of suspicion as she slowly made an exit. Pleasing pictures were created as Constance and Mrs Hardcastle stood in the curtained entrance to observe Tony before moving down to stand either side of him. He then broke downstage right, only to be pursued by his relentless mother. Constance embraced her cousin as he shared his plans for the family jewels and they fled the scene having heard Mrs Hardcastle's sobs offstage as she discovered the casket was missing. She brandished the poker from the fireplace as she made a desperate attempt to hunt down the "*thieves*" and the servants popped their heads on stage to observe this with amusement. The first act came to a close with added action as Hardcastle tip-toed on whilst signalling to the audience before settling, contented into his armchair with his paper.

The second act opened with business between Pimple and Diggory, with her in a compromising position whilst using the bellows at the fireplace and him making some bold advances before running off. Thereafter followed an amusing exchange as Pimple attempted to train Kate to “*disguise your voice*”. A dynamic sequence followed as Marlow pulled Kate onto his lap before turning her around and picking her up, and she swiftly secreted her duster within her overskirt when Hardcastle entered the room. When Marlow returned within this scene he assumed position on the downstage left chair to deliver an energised aside to the audience and executed enthusiastic hip movements on “*such motion*” as he bragged to Hastings. It was most pleasing when all of the items in the room came into context during Hardcastle’s rant as he claimed ownership of his home to an amused Marlow who simply laughed him off, unperturbed and entirely clueless. Later in this lengthy scene the blocking succinctly supported the narrative when Hastings’ letter arrived, with Tony’s dismissal, Constance’s panic and Mrs Hardcastle’s indignance all being clearly communicated. It was amusing when Tony attempted to sneak out of the room and then cowered behind the armchair. Hastings, Marlow and Constance all then piled the blame onto a hapless Tony which was followed by a tense stand-off between Hastings and Marlow. Hastings sat resigned in the downstage left chair but following a positive rally from Tony, he exited through the auditorium at the end of the scene.

The setting then changed to “*the bottom of the garden*” for Act 2, Scene 2 and this was created by opening the central flats out to reveal a beautifully painted backdrop of layered trees with bare branches sat against a night sky. Hastings entered through the auditorium, as did Hardcastle whilst delivering lines of dialogue as he travelled onto the stage. The final scene returned to the interior of the house and the curtained entrance was fully concealed to heighten the comedic impact of the interjections made from behind here by Sir Charles and Hardcastle. As the final revelations unfolded, a nice picture was created onstage as Tony and Mrs Hardcastle and later Constance and Hastings entered the scene. Tony knelt to deliver his anti-proposal and four servants edged in to witness this comical moment. Mrs Hardcastle demonstrated her displeasure by hitting her son and niece with her fan before flouncing off stage. Hardcastle took position centre stage with Kate and Marlow either side of him as he gave his blessing before Marlow offered her a ring and they embraced to conclude the play.

## **COSTUME**

Helen Smith on costumes and Jilly Hudson on wigs crafted together a series of looks that suited both period and character. Hardcastle wore a red jacket, sage waistcoat, brown breeches, long socks and brogues with buckle details added. For Scene 3 he added an elaborate periwig in an effort to raise his status, which was totally lost on his misinformed house guests. Mrs Hardcastle first appeared in a blue and white gown with matching bows in her hair. Her make up included rosy cheeks and a beauty spot near her mouth, as per the fashion of the period. Her hair was curled and she wore a string of pearls to suggest her wealth and also played into the character’s emotional investment in the family jewels. She later appeared in a pink and red gown (of course, with ribbons to match) with a gold bodice. For Act Two she returned to her opening costume and for the garden scene also put on a cloak and white gloves.

Tony wore a charming floral waistcoat with beige trousers, long black boots and a black neckerchief and for his visit to the inn wore a fabulous bright orange jacket. Kate entered the first scene wearing a charming pink striped gown with a red overcoat and pink bows in her hair. So as to appear ‘plain’ (and to effectively contrast with her transformation) her make-up was limited and her hair was tied back into a simple bun. Later, to placate her father, she had made an effort to be “fashionable” by wearing a long green gown with floral panelling details. She had applied more make-up and wore her hair loose. Constance’s yellows suited the character as she appeared in a long gown with a matching headband and white ribbons in her long curled blonde wig. She put on a cream shawl for act two as the evening drew in. Marlow looked striking in a dusty pink two-piece (jacket and

breeches) and a waistcoat edged with gold and feature buttons. He held a three-cornered black hat and wore a long red wig that was tied back with a black ribbon. Hastings looked smart in a brown wig, long black boots and navy attire with teal details on the pockets and sleeves to match his distinctive waistcoat. The servants of the household were simply dressed and wore caps and aprons to communicate their roles. Sir Charles appeared in the second act looking splendid in a gold jacket, floral waistcoat, brown breeches and a grey wig.

### **PROPS**

These were suitably sourced by Vivien Ludgate. Items used in the first scene included Hardcastle's newspaper, Mrs Hardcastle's handkerchief, the ornamental bowl of punch that was also used in Scene 3 and Kate entered carrying a basket of flowers. Several tankards were used in the second scene and the servants carried a rake and a broom at the top of Scene 3. Much fun was had with the items used to tempt their guests, including a menu, a pig's head on a silver tray and brains proffered from a serving dish. Mrs Hardcastle enjoyed flourishing a red and black fan during Scene 3 and Tony clutched a small casket that contained the family jewels. In the second act, Kate "*the barmaid*" enjoyed flitting around Marlow with a duster and had a set of keys on a chain that clipped into her skirt. Marlow had a hankie set up his sleeve to conveniently hand over to Kate and Diggory brought on a letter for Tony that he then handed over to his mother.

### **SOUND**

As the play opened, string and harpsichord music played to accompany the activity on stage, with incidental music taken from John Playford's *Popular Tunes*, as performed by The Broadside Band. A bell rang offstage towards the end of the opening scene and this being delivered live was a thoughtful touch. All dialogue and vocals were delivered acoustically with no issues from any cast member in terms of clarity and volume, including the spirited performance of the '*Alehouse Song*'. During Scene 3, sound effects of a horse and carriage played to signal the arrival of Marlow and Hastings and later an offstage speaker delivered clanging effects to suggest the direction of the kitchen. As heard during the society's Autumn production of *Bouncers*, I appreciated that the sound design utilised a PA system incorporating speakers backstage as well across the auditorium. As the lights faded on the final picture of the first act, strings music played and in the second act a rumble of thunder played as Hardcastle entered in the opening scene. A cow effect played from the direction in which Tony had pointed it out and the opening track was used to bookend the play as Kate and Marlow made their union. Overall, this sound design by Mark Lambert was astutely created and operated.

### **LIGHTING**

Adrian Hole's design was simple and effective and delivered with accuracy by Nick Baker. Scene 1 was well lit with bright coverage cast across the stage and discreet lights were positioned in the fireplace which was a lovely touch of detail that brought this feature to life. For Scene 2 the right side of the stage was focused as much of the action took place here, with warmth used to suggest the time of day. The state dimmed during Scene 3 at the point in which the play moves into Act III (in the script) in order to suggest a passing of time. Hardcastle's state of repose held at the end of the first act followed by a fade to black. Blues illuminated Act 2, Scene 2 to enhance this setting and provided a pleasant contrast to previous states used. The lighting returned to the interior state for Act 2, Scene 3 and concluded with a pink special to elevate the final picture.

### **STAGE MANAGEMENT**

SM Jessica Colson and ASM Vivian Ludgate, worked incredibly hard to set scenes up to short pieces of music, in particular the transition from Scene 2 to 3 that involved striking and resetting items of furniture as well as manoeuvring pieces of set. Similarly, they navigated the change into and out of the garden in Act 2 (again, to a very short piece of music!) with precision and a sense of confidence.

## INDIVIDUAL PERFORMANCES

**Richard Culham as Mr Hardcastle:** This jovial character enjoyed joking with his wife in the opening scene before grimacing as she exited with her son. His views on their unusual relationship were made clear before launching into a relaxed, engaging direct address with the audience. By contrast, he doted on Kate and did his utmost to convince her of his plans to marry Marlow. He despaired at the ineptitude of his staff in Scene 3 and was perplexed by his guests' behaviour including when Marlow handed him his shoes and was at a total loss on "*I have nothing that you like*". His mirth upon discovering Marlow's treatment of Kate was swiftly persuaded away by his clever daughter who placated him with ease. During Act 2, Scene 1 the character shot a comedic, pointed look out to the audience on the line "*I believe you do*". His anger swiftly returned on "*this house is mine*" and his rant thereafter was delivered with energised rage.

**Bev Taylor-Wade as Mrs Hardcastle:** This suitably overbearing character was introduced to a receptive audience as she sobbed into her hankie on several occasions. Bev made the most of the line, "*he wants to break my heart*" in Scene 3 which landed to comedic effect and when discussing the jewels she threw obvious looks to her son. She elevated the character's incensed reaction to Hasting's letter ("*the hag... I, the hag*") and pushed the melodrama in Act 2, Scene 2 as she threw herself at her husband's feet.

**Catarina da Silva as Kate Hardcastle:** This witty, articulate character was delivered with a keen understanding of the playing style and a lovely, resonant speaking voice. Catarina played the subtext well, such as the character's less than enthusiastic response to her father's intentions for her. Despite Marlow's awkwardness she demonstrated kindness and patience with a sense of cool intellect during their first encounter. The humour was expertly delivered as Kate made herself abundantly clear on "*the original exceeds the description*". She was amused by her father's contrasting experience of Marlow, moving on to expertly manipulate his seemingly staunch position as she sat on the footstool and took his paper away to subtly influence his viewpoint. Catarina had fun with her "*barmaid*" disguise and it was clear that the character was enjoying playing this role as Marlow literally swept her off her feet. Thereafter, she didn't miss a beat as she eased her father's anger without a moment's hesitation. The faux crying was appropriately overplayed and comedic nose-blowing was well placed to cover a deft aside, with Kate ultimately enjoying the final revelation shared with a confounded Marlow.

**Cameron Thrower as Tony Lumpkin:** The simplicity of this character was not overplayed and he enjoyed his initial encounter with Marlow, clearly setting up the main narrative of misdirection. Cameron brought out the lightness and energy of the character as the epicentre of social activity in Scene 2, which starkly contrasted his state of despair as his mother attempted to control him in Scene 3. He widely denounced his engagement with Constance in Scene 3 and exchanged horrified looks with her following his mother's declaration, "*you shall be married tomorrow*" in the second act. Cameron hammed up Tony's performance in Act 2, Scene 2 as he tricked his mother into thinking that they were being set upon and then enjoyed some vigorous coughing for his father's benefit.

**Sam Frost as Young Marlow:** The character's pomp and status were firmly established with a heightened accent, and his dismissive views of Hardcastle were evident during their first encounter as he slung a leg over the arm of his chair and used intonation to patronise. The dialogue was phrased succinctly as the character did his utmost to save face wherever possible and the audience warmed to him as he shared his sense of unease when contemplating his first meeting with Kate. Marlow became a nervous wreck in her presence, adopting closed-in body language with clasped

hands, hunched shoulders and a bowed head so as to avoid eye contact with her. When he met with the “*barmaid*” he oozed with charm and confidence but this was replaced with horror as he learnt that he was not staying at an inn, making a humble apology to his host in Act 2, Scene 2.

**Peter Sangston as Hastings:** This was an extremely confident performance. Peter appeared to be entirely comfortable on the stage and relished in his character’s dry wit, intelligence and disdainful views of others. He swiftly took control as his companion started to crumble in Scene 3 and enjoyed deftly testing Tony later in this scene as he set up his plans to unite with Constance. The muted, stunned response to the jewels being given to “*the landlady*” was nicely delivered and his friendship with Marlow was well developed throughout the piece.

**Christiana Bingley as Constance Neville:** The youth and frivolity of the character was well established by the manner in which she shuffled onto the stage. In the opening scene she clearly established a close relationship with Kate as she succinctly introduced her backstory. The surly teenage relationship she shared with her cousin as she taunted him in Scene 3 was entertaining, with her eventually chasing him off the stage during this scene. The audience enjoyed her obvious sarcasm, such as the po-faced delivery of “*a violent passion for my cousin*” and Christiana played the ruse of the letter well, clearly inventing the contents and struggling in the process.

Other members of the company played a variety of characters that lifted the energy of the piece and supported delivery of the narrative. Roger Chadbourne’s Jeremy enjoyed a featured moment in Act 2, Scene 1 in which he staggered on stage with his buttons done up haphazardly and his necktie askew before belching loudly and then running off to vomit; this was quite the cameo! The audience enjoyed Gilly Savage’s portrayal of Pimple including her encounters with Diggory and the brief insight into her relationship with Kate during the second act as she offered her some advice. Adrian Harding provided much amusement as the roguish Diggory including the business with a rake at the top of Scene 3. His Sir Charles was a genteel, respectable gentleman and his status was played in an understated, effective manner. Olivia Kippax conscientiously supported scenes as both the Barmaid and Servant and John Crabtree continued his impressive dedication to this production with onstage appearances as Roger and Little Aminadab. Surely it was John’s passion for this play that inspired the success of this production, along with the talents and hard work of everyone involved.