Ad Hoc are currently in the middle of a major refurbishment of their normal home in the Harrold Centre, so are, as they put it, keeping their hand in with a touring production whilst awaiting the grand reopening in the autumn. So this production has taken place in 3 different venues over 3 different nights, Odell, Stevington and Carlton. I chose to visit the Stevington venue.

Stevington village hall is not exactly kitted out for touring theatre and is quite small, the audience being shoehorned into an ad hoc (pardon the pun) arrangement of tables and chairs which actually created quite a cosy intimate arrangement with, I was told, an audience of about 70, complete with the smallest makeshift stage you could imagine, created from a set of blacks with only the nightclub name at the rear of the stage. I promise you I have seen bigger Inglenook fireplaces. It was going to take some directing to successfully move around without tripping over each other. Props just consisted of some brightly coloured dinky little handbags to denote the female characters. But oh boy, did it all work!

Lighting by Paul Alexander and Chris Chaplin was very well done especially as it was on tour and in unfamiliar surroundings. And Peter Keeley hit the sound cues with absolute perfection.

Bouncers is of course Godber’s masterpiece and is not only his most well known work, it is certainly his most performed. It was originally written in 1977 and then reworked in 1991 resetting it in the 80’s. It is also a relentless piece which never lets up, with all four actors permanently on stage playing the four bouncers and four girls out for a night on the town as well as other characters they meet along the way, nearly 30 different parts between them. I have now seen it performed five times including a professional touring company, so I’m beginning to know it well and I’m yet to see one I haven’t thoroughly enjoyed, or been surprised by the innovation the various groups come up with. Ad hoc were no exception, this was certainly one of the best I’ve seen. The imagination and sheer skill involved was masterful. Fran Ross is a very imaginative director and certainly stamped her own interpretation all over it. What was particularly clever was the amount of choreography she brought to the table, which was delivered with perfect comic effect by her consummate actors. A particular mention of the Michael Jackson’s Thriller setting, that had the audience absolutely rolling in the aisles, which on a stage that size was all the more remarkable. Another clever trick was to get the actors not involved in a particular piece of action to simply turn their backs to the audience. The levels of concentration and discipline required were immense especially on a stage so small. All round very clever directing indeed.

When I first read the programme on arrival I instantly knew this was in safe acting hands, all four of these actors being very experienced comedy actors I have seen before. The brilliant Rick Davis as Lucky Eric was on absolute top form, his facial expressions and especially the use of his eyes was just brilliant. He really does have an extensive range of characters in his locker. Simon Wells as the ‘porn loving nutter,’ Judd who is permanently baiting Eric, nailed the violence of the character keeping just on the right side of comedic. The fight scene between him and Eric was almost too realistic, I’m sure several members of the audience were convinced one of them was injured. Again, very well choreographed. Phil Briggs as Les was a comedic delight with some wonderful portrayals, particularly when he was playing any of the women. Simon Alaluf as Ralph was just born to play comedy, he really does know now to deliver a punch line to maximum effect. The director told me afterwards that none of her four actors thought they could either sing or dance. Yeah right, next they will have you believing they can’t act!

So what a wonderful evening’s entertainment, am dram at its very best, pretty much faultless and certainly very funny. Village hall comedy drama is alive and well and living somewhere in the vicinity of Harrold, Carlton, Odell and now it appears, Stevington. Can’t wait to see them back in their newly refurbished home in the autumn.

Thank you Ad Hoc for your hospitality and top notch entertainment!