

Bazaar and Rummage by Sue Townsend directed by Hilary Cunningham
Kapiti Playhouse, Paraparaumu till 13 June

Reviewed by Ewen Coleman 3 June

Author Sue Townsend, probably best known for her Adrian Mole books, has also written a number of plays just as insightful as Adrian Mole, none probably more so than *Bazaar and Rummage*.

Commonly known in this part of the world as Bring and Buy sales, they are also very akin to modern day garage sales. This particular sale is set somewhere back in the '70's in a church hall in London where a group of agoraphobic women who, as part of a their therapy in a self-help group, decide to break through their troubled and insular lives for one day at least by staging a bazaar and rummage sale.

The three agoraphobics are Katrina (Caroline Milligan) an ex-variety songstress, Bell-Bell (Nikki McKelvie) who has an obsession with cleanliness and Margaret (Liz Kay) a foul-mouthed agoraphobic. Then at the end arrives a Policewoman (Petronella Carvey) with her own set of problems. Overseeing this group is Gwenda (Rachel Neilson) a volunteer social worker who hinders and controls more than helps and Fliss (Geena Collins-Oldham), a trainee social worker and the only really sane one amongst them who manages to keep them all together. By the time everyone leaves the hall it is apparent that their agoraphobia is not cured but at least they have made a start.

A witty and entertaining yet poignant play showing the fears, hopes and disappointments of these people, both carers and cared-for, trying to come to terms with what for many is a serious illness. The sense of a church hall and all the required jumble for such a sale was well established in Hilary Cunningham's production and even though at times the actors appeared to be standing around aimlessly there were some very funny moments as well as touching ones. All of the actors created real and believable characters drawing the audience into their world as each slowly opened up and divulged the reasons behind their agoraphobia. They made much of the humour in the play and added in some clever songs to up the tempo make this a fascinating yet entertaining look into the lives of people we rarely hear about.