

The Questors Theatre Archives
Questories
New Plays Festivals
17th Festival 1976

AMATEUR STAGE

April 1976

SANCTUARY

SANCTUARY, by James Keller. Burgundy; 16th. century. 17m., 11f., extras (doubling).
Questors Th. Co. Ealing.

The raison d'être of the Questors' annual New Plays Festival (now in its 17th. year!) is to provide a shop window for inexperienced or little-known playwrights of promise to try out their wings in production, and to give a showing to "uncommercial" plays which in these inflationary times might not otherwise see the light of day. Certainly both these criteria are totally fulfilled in the opening play of this year's Festival: the young Australian author James Keller is little known, yet has obvious talent, which needs to learn the gentle art of self-discipline; and with a cast of 1f. to 17m. this is hardly likely to be tackled by other companies, either amateur or professional (though the Questors reduced this number by some doubling, which caused the audience to ponder whether there was any symbolic or hidden significance apart from the purely practical problem of male shortage!).

I always feel it is something of a "cheat" (justifiable or not, according to fancy and taste) when a playwright sets the action on All Fools' Night, and in this 16th. century tale of pure love and impure corruption he makes the most of the opportunities this offers for sliding readily to and fro between reality and fantasy, with the aid of a troupe of travelling players.

There are really two distinct one-act plays — which the author attempts to weave, not always successfully, into a harmonious unity. In fact, one of these — the corrupt grip on the town of the closed shop of the merchants' "Brotherhood of the Rose" guild — after setting up an interesting situation, is virtually discarded. The author concentrates on the pure young Lady in the Garden, whom, with her husband away at the crusades, the lecherous leader of the Brotherhood and the Bishop consider fair game; but finally the lady's honour is saved, after suspicion had fallen upon a wandering minstrel, by a re-enactment of the story of Susanna and the Elders.

R.S.