

THE QUESTORS STUDENT GROUP 21  
THE MAD WOMAN OF CHAILLOT  
July 1968

Press transcripts

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THAMES VALLEY TIMES  
23 July 1968

### **'MAD WOMAN' TALKS WITH POISE, PRECISION**

HAVING disposed of a dozen "pimps" who constituted a threat to the freedom of humanity, Aurelia, the "Mad Woman of Chaillot", proudly asserts: "Nothing is ever so wrong in this world that a sensible woman can't put right in an afternoon."

This line and many others are delivered with poise and precision by Hilary Ellwood in the Questors' Theatre Club's second-year student group production of Jean Giraudoux's play, "The Mad Woman of Chaillot," which is running for the rest of this week except Thursday.

Resembling an ageing hippie with a mop of frizzy ginger hair, Miss Ellwood gives distinctive lustre to this challenging role, which requires an odd mixture of madness and calculating perception.

She is well backed up by the rest of the cast, especially the three other mad women of Passy, St. Sulpice and La Concorde, played by Barbara Butters, Avril Lotinga and Cherry Kane.

The scene at the beginning of the second act, where three of the four mad women foregather in Aurelia's basement room, is like a modernised version of one of the witches' meetings in "Macbeth". Just as Aurelia is about to announce a proposal that will alter the fate of the world, Constance, the Mad Woman of Passy, protests: "Can't it wait until tomorrow? I want to wash my slippers."

### **MORE TO IT**

Later in the conversation, Aurelia learns of the virginity of Gabrielle, the Mad Woman of St. Sulpice: "She can't be that innocent... she keeps canaries." Obviously there is much more to "The Mad Woman" than the zany, often absurd, dialogue would have us believe. Giraudoux, who died in 1944, feared the stranglehold of the plutocrats. As a soldier in France during the first world war, he wrote: "I grow more and more bitter against humbugs and swindlers. We will kill them after the war."

In the play, Aurelia hits on the idea of killing off the "humbugs and swindlers" of Chaillot by shutting them in an endless underground passage, having convinced them all of the existence of an oil well at its base.

The large cast has been extremely well handled by director Michael Hoddell and his associate, Jill Champion-Torrance. Although there were often more than a dozen players on stage at the same time, one never had the feeling of overcrowding.

Sheila Sorley and Nigel Cowell were responsible for the imaginative sets, and costumes were designed by John Rolfe.

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Middlesex County Times  
26 July 1968

### **GIRAUDOUX HIT STIRS QUESTORS' AUDIENCES**

THE most entertaining and stimulating play I have seen at the Questors Theatre had its opening night last Saturday and closes tomorrow (Saturday) evening.

The play, "The Madwoman of Chaillot", was put on by The Questors Second Year Student Group, and if the students maintain this standard it augurs well for the long-term future of the theatre.

The theme of this play by Jean Giraudoux, like the new Beatle's cartoon film, is a whimsical plea for eccentricity and individualism to take the place of self-interested bureaucracy.

Countess Aurelia, the Madwoman of Chaillot, lives in a cocoon world- shielded from the harshness of reality by an assortment of society rejects—a clown, a deaf mute, a flower girl, a waiter and a street singer.

One day they are all at her pavement cafe when a group of bureaucrats discuss ways of getting richer. Their plan is to drill for oil in the heart of Paris.

#### **EVIL WORLD**

This is too much for the society rejects. They decide the world has become so evil it is time the Countess faced the truth; so they tell her the world is not the happy place she believes it is. Aliens are corrupting the goodness, and are forcing others to join them. She decides to put things right, discusses the situation with three other "madwomen," holds a mock trial and sends the representatives of evil bureaucracy — The Presidents, The Prospectors, The Press Agents, and the women behind them — in search of more power and money. It is a search that will end in death.

Every part was well acted, but especially the title role, played by Hilary Ellwood. With her striking red hair, piercing eyes and haughty voice, she handled her part to perfection.

In the most -amusing scene, her tea party for the other "madwomen", she was ably supported by Barbara Buttress [*sic*], Avril Lotinga and Cherry Kane.

#### **SPINE-CHILLING**

The play was always entertaining, witty in places, sometimes provocative — and in one passage, at least, very dramatic. This was towards the end of the trial scene when the defendant was asked his ultimate aim.

"War," he said. And suddenly the lights went out and searchlights started flashing

round the theatre, into the faces of the audience. This may be commonplace at productions like "US," and other audience participation happenings, but it was most unexpected and spine-chilling here.

The sets — a cafe terrace and the countess's cellar bedroom — were simple, but cleverly designed by Sheila Sorley and Nigel Cowell.

**P.C.**

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