

COMING EVENTS AT THE QUESTORS

January 11th, 12th and 13th.

First Production by The Questors STUDENT GROUP.

It is planned to round off the intensive work of the Student Group in their first year with a performance which will enable the Club to appreciate the attainments of the students and will give them a chance to show their paces. The programme will comprise:

Scenes from "CRANFORD," adapted by Michael Kelly;

"EXERCISE LETTER," a sample of Student Group work; and

"THE CRADLE SONG" (Act 1), by G. and N. Sierra.

This will be an extra-programme item, and members will not on this occasion be entitled to free seats. All seats will be bookable through the Box Office Manager in the usual way—there will be one price only, 2s. 6d.

The performances on Saturday, January 11th, and Monday, January 13th, will begin at 7.30 p.m.; the Sunday performance on January 12th will be a matinee starting at 3 p.m.

The Box Office will be open immediately after Christmas, but, as postal difficulties may cause some delay in issuing notices, members are asked to note the details now.

NEXT PRODUCTION — OPENING FEBRUARY 8TH

The Fourth Production of the current season will be:

Anton Tchekhov's "THE SEAGULL"

In connection with this production, there has been a competition in Stage Design which our friends of the Highbury Little Theatre, Sutton Coldfield, were good enough to adjudicate for us. The winning entry was submitted by Norman Branson; Honor O'Nians was runner-up. During the run of "Much Ado About Nothing," some of the designs for this competition will be on display on the walls of the Theatre for members to examine.

THE QUESTORS THEATRE MATTOCK LANE, EALING

SEASON 1946-47. THIRD PRODUCTION



wish you

A Merry Xmas

and present

"MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING"

BY

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

DECEMBER 1946

PROGRAMME

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FOURPENCE

TAKING STOCK

The Questors wish all their many friends and supporters a Merry Christmas and a Prosperous New Year in 1947. They hope that their present production will contribute to the merriment of the Club's members and their friends during the Christmas season; it is a little beyond their powers to ensure prosperity in 1947, but their wish that it may be general is not the less sincere on that account.

But, when all the good wishes for future prosperity which are traditional at this season of the year have been exchanged, it is good to get down to the more serious business of reviewing achievements and considering how far past endeavours have yielded the results that were aimed at by those who undertook them.

How far have The Questors, on the basis of the three productions and other functions since September last, reason to be pleased with their achievements? Complacency is a dangerous state of mind, from which The Questors never have suffered, and it is to be hoped never will suffer. The vigorous discussions after each production, and the debates at the Active Members' meetings, are evidence enough that complacency is not likely to overtake The Questors. But there is a difference between a state of not being complacent and a readiness to offer constructive suggestions for future development. It is of such constructive suggestions that the Club is in need, and it is up to members to put them forward.

The policy of The Questors is, in the final analysis, formed by the aggregation of the views of its members. What are those members thinking as 1946 passes into 1947? Do they consider that the selection of Club plays is fully in accord with the aims and ideals of the Club? Are they satisfied with the standard of productions? Is a steady flow of "proved" plays to be preferred to a rather more experimental programme with its necessary risk of occasional failures?

These are serious questions, and they are not posed with any thought to lead Club opinion in any particular direction. But it may be hoped that all who have the Club's interests at heart will think them over. The Committee can discharge their functions only as they are fortified by the knowledge that they are acting as the members would have them do.

LITTLE THEATRE GUILD CONFERENCE

Eleven "active" members of the theatre, led by the Hon. Director, went as Questor delegates to the Little Theatre Guild Conference in Birmingham on November 9th and 10th. We were royally entertained by the Crescent Theatre—most members spending a considerable amount of their time eating and drinking! Apart from this, however, some very interesting and valuable work was done at the two sessions of the Conference on Sunday morning and afternoon; two major items being the admittance of three theatres as new members of the Guild and an interesting discussion on student work.

On the previous day all the delegates were invited to attend performances of current productions at the Crescent Theatre and Highbury Little Theatre. These were: "Of Mice and Men," by John Steinbeck, and "The Lady of Pleasure," by James Shirley. These plays were enjoyed by everyone, some of us being particularly impressed by the standard of décor, costume and presentation (if not the play itself) at the Highbury Little Theatre.

It was very valuable experience for us to see other people's work and talk with them about it. The chief advantage, however, was, I think, the enthusiasm engendered amongst the delegates by seeing other theatres working along similar lines and with similar ideas of standards and theatre values.

It will be a great pleasure for us when the Conference meets in London in February, and the delegates will be entertained by The Questors and will be invited to attend a performance of "The Scagull."

P. C.

"MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING"

By WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

Characters:

Don Pedro, Prince of Aragon ... ANTHONY WALTER
Don John, his bastard Brother ... BARRIE PITT
Claudio, a young Lord of Florence ... PETER CURTIS
Benedick, a young Lord of Padua ... TERRY McCONNELL
Leonato, Governor of Messina ... FRANCIS W. SMITH
Antonio, his Brother ... DICK WOOD
Balthazar, Servant to Don Pedro ... JOHN HOWARD
Borachio } Followers of Don John { MAURICE BALLINGER
Conrade } PETER BRYANT
Friar Francis ... ALBERT HOOPER
Dogberry, a Constable ... TOM W. FRANKLIN
Verges, a Headborough ... LISTER BECK
Watch ... ALAN FULLER, DENIS ROBINSON
A Sexton ... JOHN HITCHES
Hero, Daughter to Leonato ... JEAN McCONNELL
Beatrice, Niece to Leonato ... MURIEL LANDERS
Margaret } Gentlewomen attending on Hero { ELIZABETH ODDIE
Ursula } JANE CAMPBELL
Boy ... DORFEN COATES
Page ... BRIDGET SPALDING
Ladies in Waiting—

JOAN PYLE, RENA RICE, JOYCE WHEELER

The Play produced by MARY BALLINGER

Settings designed by ERNEST L. IVES

The action of the Play takes place in Messina, mainly in
Leonato's House and Garden

The Play will be presented in two parts and the action
within each part will be continuous

Behind the Scenes:

Stage Manager - BARRIE PITT
(Assisted by VERA LOVELOCK)

Lighting - GERALD ISENTHAL, C. E. E. JOHNSON

Properties - JOYCE WHEELER

The Club is indebted to the generosity of
J. CYRIL NAIRNE, Esq., who has kindly loaned costumes
for this production; other costumes by BRIDGET SPALDING
and the Wardrobe Staff.

Headdresses designed and made by INA COATES

Wigs by CHAS. H. FOX, LTD.

The Set built by NORMAN BRANSON, PETER ELLIS, "JIM" KELLY,
JOHN MAYO, BARRIE PITT, and DENIS ROBINSON

Stage Director - GEORGE BENN

House Manager - ARCHIE COWAN

There will be one interval of 15 minutes after Act III, Scene 2

Light refreshments will be on sale during the interval
and will be brought to members of the audience in
their seats by the Stewards

DISCUSSION

There will be a Discussion of this production at the Theatre on
Sunday, December 22nd, at 7 p.m. Refreshments will be served,
and all members of the audience are cordially invited.

THE STORY OF THE "QUEST"

HISTORICAL NOTE, No. 7

The summer of 1938 was a busy one. First of all, money had to be raised. The appeal fund finally totalled something over £150—much less than we asked for, but we were able to make it serve. Then there was the planning and execution of the work of re-seating, etc. We were fortunate in being able to buy second-hand tip-up seats at 7s. 6d. apiece; these all had to be put together and screwed down, the back seats had to be raised, the buffet-bar was built, window curtains made, dressing rooms decorated, and various other improvements effected. The later stages of the work were carried out under the shadow of Munich, which lifted (so it seemed at the time) only a few hours before the formal opening of our first season as sole tenants of our own theatre. That was the most successful season we had yet had. The programme of productions consisted of "Macbeth," Eugene O'Neill's "Days Without End," and "Noah." The first of these was notable not least because it first introduced to The Questors as designer, Graham Heywood, whose décor has been an outstanding feature of so many productions since. "Noah" probably represented the peak of our artistic endeavours pre-war. In that season we extended the run of our productions from two nights to three; audiences steadily increased, as did the membership, and we finished the season with a surplus of £32, confounding the faint-hearted who had advocated a policy of retrenchment.

During the summer of 1939, under the gathering threats of war, we undertook the big task of decorating the entire auditorium. The story of those days is told in our Annual Report, from which we quote:—

"The record of season 1939/40 is one of battle, not unsuccessful, against great difficulties.

"Last August hopes were high for a record season: our membership stood at its highest level, and there was every indication of a further substantial increase; our acting strength was solid and enthusiastic; the advance bookings of our theatre by other dramatic societies showed a large increase; a particularly interesting programme for the season was already in print, including productions of "A Month in the Country," "L'Invitation au Voyage," and "As You Like It"; the re-decoration of the theatre was nearing its final stages.

"Then, only a few days before the first production was to be cast, came the outbreak of war. In accordance with a decision previously arrived at, all the activities of the Club were suspended, pending a clarification of the position. Then or subsequently, of our 248 non-acting members, we lost no fewer than 137; a large number of our acting members were evacuated or called up, making many irreplaceable gaps in our ranks; all the bookings of the theatre were cancelled; the programme had to be scrapped; only the re-decoration of the theatre was completed, single-handed, by our Stage Manager, Mr. Fred Robinson, working alone under depressing conditions.

"Here was the ruin which we had to repair.

"After a week or two of stagnation, a gathering of the remaining acting members was held to take stock of the position. We found we had three assets: our theatre; a tremendous keenness to do something; a conviction of the importance of continuing our cultural work to the greatest possible extent under war conditions. But the full extent of our losses was not then known.

"We determined to feel our way by putting on an original Revue, for we already had a considerable amount of suitable material, which had been written for the Surprise Night which figured in the original programme. This also had the advantage of employing the whole of our available acting strength."

Not least of our worries was the financial one. Threatened with a deficit of £80, we had to strain every nerve to reduce the gap. Production expenses were reduced to the bone. Efforts were made to find further audiences, and shows were taken to A.R.P. depôts and factories, or given in our own theatre for other organisations—for anyone prepared to pay us £2 over our bare out-of-pocket expenses. Among the desperate expedients was the opening of a "Cleaning Fund," to which all the acting members contributed a penny each time they came to the theatre, in order to pay the cleaner's wages. The one thing we were not prepared to do was to surrender our policy of play-choice. Indeed, we felt more than ever that, unless the work we did was in itself worth while, it could not justify the enormous strain and difficulty of working under war conditions; this conviction became stronger as the difficulties increased—as they were to increase.

Slowly, but surely, the estimated deficit was reduced, until we eventually finished the season a few pounds on the right side. The productions that year had been, in addition to the Revue, "She Stoops To Conquer" and "Arms and the Man." A notable feature of the season was the first visit, in February, 1940, of E. Martin Browne's Pilgrim Players with "Tobias and the Angel." We nearly foundered in May, when we were forced to abandon rehearsals of Lennox Robinson's "The White-Headed Boy," owing to insurmountable casting difficulties, and found ourselves up against a blank wall as to what play we could possibly perform with the limited players available. As once before in the history of the Club, the Drama Festival provided the solution, and for the first time it included two original plays by our own members. The summer of 1940 found us still on our feet, and the first round was won. But the second round was to be a stiff struggle.

(To be continued)

A. E. J. F.

FORMATION OF NEW STUDENT GROUP

Plans are now being laid for a somewhat more ambitious programme for the Student Group which it is proposed to form early in the New Year. Details have not yet been completed, but anyone who would be interested is invited to speak or write to the General Manager, who will be happy to give further information as soon as possible.