

I must first apologise that pressure of work has so delayed the preparation of this report. This is a pity, not least because time dulls the memory and my impressions are probably not so fresh as they were.

This was a peculiarly difficult production ( have I said that before somewhere ? ). The straightforward rather static interpretation, which I felt to be right for the play, accentuated the need for (1) very clear-cut characterisation especially in the smaller parts (2) within the limits imposed, inventiveness by the players of small comedy business; (3) a carefully controlled vocal variation and pattern.

Despite the undoubted success of the show, I cannot feel that the production achieved a particularly high artistic standard, falling down mainly under point (3). The reasons for this are rather complex; the production suffered to some extent through insufficient time for preparation on my part; to some extent through insufficient rehearsal ( only 83 rehearsals hours were scheduled and quite a number of these were lost.) The latter calls for some elaboration and qualification. The scenes with the Cabinet in particular are undoubtedly extremely difficult scenes to rehearse, and progress in the later rehearsals (when one would normally be working to get the variation and pattern referred to) was very slow and laboured, due to having to go over again work done at a previous rehearsal to get a degree of smoothness in the cue-ing etc., This in its turn was dispiriting to the cast, for especially in a comedy of this kind, if a cast does not feel it is making progress at rehearsals, the effect is rather dampening and a damp comedy is uninspiring. In cancelling out one or two rehearsals towards the end, therefore, I was sacrificing the opportunity of moulding the pattern of the production, but I think we were able to dry out the damp and in the circumstances the result was a net gain. If this damp had not been there, one might have been able to gain the best of both worlds !

Another important factor in a play of this kind is the audience reaction. It was remarkable what a difference to some of the scenes was made by the presence of a small audience at ( I think ) the first dress rehearsal. Such reaction can be ~~an~~ an inspiration to the players and encourage greater inventiveness at a stage when it is not too late to "put in something new." I do urge future producers, especially of comedy, to try and get a small audience to watch the later rehearsals. Apart from the difficulties above referred to, which were substantial ones, the show progressed normally if somewhat laboriously through rehearsals, achieved in most parts of the play a considerable degree of life in performance and on the whole held together and at points improved during the run, save for an occasional flat performance.

DEC OR. Ideally speaking, I don't think it is sound for a producer to be presented with a fait accompli as far as the set is concerned - it is far more satisfactory for the designer and producer to have ample discussion in the formative stage so that their ideas may grow together. In this case, the circumstances forbade that and Beryl's designs became the starting point of the production. Whether sets would have been in any way substantially different if the more normal process had been followed, I do not know, but I never felt that the set and my production had a very close organic unity (this is in no sense a criticism of Beryl's work.) I think Beryl's set had an excellent feeling for the play and a good sense of the style. I think there is force in the criticism that the apron arches by facing directly at the audience hampered certain entrances and exits. I did not suggest any change because I felt to do so would have



resulted in a certain loss in the style of the set as a whole - this is just one of those things that would probably have been ironed out in discussion while ideas were still forming. Under this heading I will also refer to the furniture, which I thought was excellently chosen.

WARDROBE. No one, I think, was particularly happy about the uniforms, which were the best we could find. Whether a more prolonged search would have produced anything better, I don't know. I think perhaps we did leave it a little late before trying. As regards the rest of the clothes, I have nothing but praise for the work of Audrey Hounslow and the wardrobe staff in making anything so nearly resembling bricks with no straw at all, and ~~the~~ for the saint-like patience with which last minute rejections and demands for alterations were met. This business of adapting from existing wardrobe stock is getting increasingly difficult, and I would like to see occasional shows at least when the costumes can be designed and made afresh. Could this not be done with at least one period show a year? And meanwhile could not the Wardrobe be given authority and asked to make a determined effort to build up some store of materials by taking any opportunity that offers to buy?

SET CONSTRUCTION. I need only record that this reached the very high standard we are now accustomed to expect from the workshop. For my part I was entirely satisfied. If it was rather a rush to get finished, this is due to the very heavy burden of work falling on the stage staff at the present time, and the difficulty of starting the sets of one production before the preceding show is over.

STAGE MANAGEMENT. As far as I could judge, the show was managed quite smoothly, though we never quite succeeded in holding the second interval down to its scheduled length. This might perhaps have been achieved if it had been possible to find time to check and adjust in practice the scene change routine which had been worked out. I was grateful for Gordon's hard work and running of the show, and the able assistance he received.

PROPERTIES. Care and trouble in the search for properties was well rewarded, and though some important hand-props were perhaps a little late in being available, there were no serious worries for the producer. The basket of flowers was a veritable achievement.

LIGHTING. Nothing spectacular was called for, but a lot of work in careful siting and balancing of lamps, was ably carried out by Carl and Gerry.

SOUND. This department too has been setting a far higher standard of late, and personally I was very happy in the contribution Albert made to the show.

ACTING. A very important thing in such a play as this is to achieve a good general level of playing, without any obvious weak spots. On the whole I think this was achieved.

Pamphilus (Philip Allen) Philip did some good solid work in this slightly thankless part and managed to create a real character. His understudy was duly thankful that he managed to stay the course!

Sempronius (Dick Wood.) The difficult opening scene never quite scored its effect on the laughs it should have brought. Technically, Dick had difficulty in achieving the combination of pace, crispness, lightness and attack that was really required and the playing I thought was a little self-conscious even at its best moments. In all comedy playing there must be a degree of consciousness of the audience, but that is not the same thing as consciousness of self. Dick's best moment was the end of the Interlude, probably because he found the right key more instinctively.



Boanerges (Frank White) Frank was under the handicap of starting rather late on the part. It was largely on this account I think that he lacked some of the finer light and shade in the part and that his playing was more finished in Act 2 than his playing in the less thoroughly rehearsed Act 1. The second Act I thought was very rich, the first Act rich only in places. He found many delightful points of timing and of character.

King Magnus (Eric Batson) An actor must play a part of this magnitude in accordance with his own capabilities and personality. No doubt another actor's interpretation would be different. I think Eric was absolutely right, for him, to tackle the part as he did. By rather under-playing, he allowed the part gradually to develop through the play. In this way the part "grew on" the audience and I felt the audience achieved a very high measure of success. It was noticeable how Eric improved in variety when he had an audience to play to. Just occasionally he allowed himself to overdo an inflexion.

Princess Alice (Rita Devoti) It was bad luck on Rita that in her first part with The Questors she was, I think, rather miscast. It was not her fault therefore that she did not quite bring out the comedy of the part.

Balbus (Alan Fuller) While Alan perhaps did not succeed in achieving quite such a detailed character study as some other members of the cabinet (more inventiveness would have helped) his performance had good solid qualities and was always reliable. It developed very well technically but perhaps rather less so imaginatively.

Nicobar (Cyril Box) In many ways this performance was an object lesson - it was most beautifully detailed and finished, full of imaginative touches and always vividly alive. One of the most outstanding "small part" performances I remember on The Questors stage. The only pit was that Cyril developed fluency so late in the rehearsal period, thus in some degree handicapping the development of the production.

Crassus (Frank Smith) Another excellently detailed performance with some very good touches. I was puzzled by the fact that some of the comedy did not get over better than it did. This may have been due to timing just short of a hundred per cent or perhaps to a slight vocal weakness - I had the feeling occasionally that his voice was just a trifle strained.

Pliny (John Howard) It was interesting to watch how John gradually grew into his part. In earlier rehearsals I feared it was going to be rather "amateurish", a bit over-done, but it seemed gradually to acquire more roots and a greater sense of truth until it finally hung together as a good character sketch. Just occasionally a lack of pace let it down a little - a quality John has some difficulty in achieving.

Proteus (Wilfrid Sharp) There have been critics who suggested that Wilfrid was inclined to burlesque the part too much. Personally, I don't think so, though it may have been a bear shave at times. The part is written nearly up to the edge of burlesque without ever going over it. Wilfrid rightly played it nearly up to the edge of burlesque and if just occasionally the edge was a tiny bit blurred, that was a minor blemish. The playing was vital, with plenty of attack and a most valuable sense of comedy.

Iysistrata (Betty Ogden) This I thought had directness, intelligence, integrity, drive, enough passion to get by, and was in fact an excellent performance - as far as it went. But rather oddly, it did not go quite far enough, only to the first few rows. This lack of projection (which I have noted before



with Betty) is a great pity when there is so much intelligence behind her work, and I think is attributable to a certain lack of vocal power. I would urge her to work hard to improve the power of her voice - it can be done and would tremendously increase her effectiveness as an actress.

Amanda (Pamela Richards.) I thought this was a very well conceived performance, attacked with excellent spirit but which did not quite come off because there always remained a trace of self-consciousness. This was accentuated by the difficulty Pamela had in sustaining the accent - I think perhaps she should keep off dialect parts.

Orintha (Peggy Pope) I think Peggy made a very valiant attempt at this difficult part, calling as it does for a tremendous dynamic personality. I am sure she will have gained a lot from having had a shot at it. She had some moments which were completely convincing. Others were spoiled by a certain self-consciousness of movement - a good dose of movement classes would help her no end. Her comedy timing was sometimes off the mark, possibly again because she was a bit over-conscious about it. At the same, it was a very good effort.

The Queen (Bliss Barrett) This part seemed to fit Bliss like a glove - anyway it was a delightfully "right" performance. An occasional tendency to a weak line-ending needs to be watched.

Vanhattan (Tom Franklin.) Tom had more difficulty with this part than I had expected and early progress was slow. I think perhaps Tom has more difficulty than most with parts he does not get instinctively. Nobody could have worked harder and, as always, had work had its reward in a good, honest, solid, consistent performance.

In conclusion I should like again to express my grateful thanks to Abraham Asseo who, as associate producer, contributed most of the "bright ideas" as were in the production, and who was a tremendous stand-by all through.

Alfred E.J. Emmet.  
Producer.