

Middx County Times

7 June 1952

Questors to present another new play

On Saturday next, June 14, the sixth production of the current season will open at the Questors Theatre, Mattock-lane. The play, which will be receiving its premiere presentation, is "Edge Of The World," written by Norman Latimer.

This play is described in the Questors' Club Magazine, "Fore-Stage," as "another new play of exceptionally high quality." "It is a modern play," the description continues, "set in a dilapidated circus and having a strong story, powerful characters, and intensely dramatic situations. It also has a rare distinction in the writing, and should provide an exciting evening."

The box office is now open at the theatre, and members are advised to make early application for their free seats. Non-members are invited to apply to the Theatre Manager (Miss Rena Rice) at the Questors Theatre, Mattock - lane, W.5 (Phone: Eal. 5184, from whom all details of membership can be obtained.

Middx County Times

14 Jun 1952

"Edge of the World" at Questors to-night

ANOTHER LOCAL PREMIERE PERFORMANCE

The sixth production of the current Questors' season, and the first play to open in their own theatre, will receive its premiere performance tonight, at 7.30. The play, written by Norman Latimer, is entitled "Edge of the Word," and the run continues until Tuesday week, June 24.

Mr. Norman Latimer has had a full and varied theatrical career, having acted with the famous Birmingham Repertory Theatre and with Donald Wolfit's Comnay; and also having produced his own plays at the Gateway Theatre and at the "Q." He is at present working as an instructor at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art.

"Edge of the World," his latest play, has a circus setting, and promises to provide a particularly exciting evening. This play has been nominated for the Charles Henry Foyle New Play Award, thus making two entries from the Questors Theatre for this award since its inception just over a year ago.

Members who have not already done so are advised to make early application for their free seats for this production. Non-members interested in the theatre are invited to apply to the Theatre Manager (Miss Rena Rice) at the Questors Theatre, Mattock-lane, Ealing (phone Ealing 5184), from whom all particulars can be obtained.

The Times

17 July 1952

QUESTORS THEATRE,
EALING

"EDGE OF THE WORLD"

By NORMAN LATIMER

It is an admirable thing when the amateur actor, not content with plays of proven worth, joins in the theatre's perpetual search for good new ones. The question here is whether Mr. Norman Latimer's new piece quite comes into that category. It has, at any rate, some interesting qualities, and was well worth putting to the test of performance.

The scene is a corner of a tenth-rate, tumble-down travelling circus pitched outside a village on the west coast of Ireland. That is an excellent beginning, in itself a holiday from the humdrum. Now for the drama itself. The action-plot is inconsiderable. An idiot bear-leader, as touchingly helpless as the idiot in *Of Mice and Men*, is given to stealing food for his bear. This time he has found the carcass of a horse and cut it up, and the indignant villagers demand compensation and, failing that, threaten to wreck the circus. The emotion-plot, on which the author seems chiefly to rely, is rather more considerable. The idiot's wife is infatuated with an acrobat and he, very unwillingly, with her. Even so, the infatuation might have been plain sailing were it not for another member of the company whom the lady once repulsed and whose taunts disturb the acrobat, anger the lady, and drive her husband to kill the mischief-maker, for which the lady holds herself responsible. There is also a telling atmosphere of despair blent with incongruous courage: the despair of the younger members of the troupe, despair about their loves and their future, and the irrational conviction of the old circus proprietor that some day, somehow, Michael O'Donovan's World-famous Circus will deserve the name.

What we miss in the play is an idea-plot. Apart from infatuation, despair and irrational courage, there is no theme. But as one might expect in a play written by an actor, there are effective parts for actors, and on the whole these amateur actors make the most of them. Miss Alexandra Mikellatos plays a hard-bitten Irish fortune-teller in something like the grand manner, there is another racy character-sketch by Mr. David Lorraine, and Mr. Ned Gethings is extremely touching as the bear-leader. Miss Olga Landiak and Mr. John Clemow have a good shot at the lovers, to whom, indeed, the author has left rather more than their interest as characters would seem to justify.

ES

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The Times - 9 JUN 1952

The Unity Theatre's next production will be *Barrier Across Europe*, by Mr. Eric Paice, to be seen on Friday, and that of the Questors Theatre, Ealing, a new play by Mr. Norman Latimer called *Edge of the World*, which opens on Saturday. The resumed run of *Women of Twilight*, which was to have begun at the Victoria Palace on Saturday, has been postponed until the following Wednesday, June 18, in order to allow several members of the company to appear in the film version which is now being made at the Elstree studios.

Thames Valley Times

31 June 1952



AMATEUR
THEATRE



THE QUESTORS (Ealing), for their sixth production of the season, have chosen a new play, "Edge of the World," by Norman Latimer. Alfred Emmet, who judged the stagecraft competitions at the T.V.G.T. festival, is producing and the play is being presented at the Questors' Theatre from next Saturday until June 24th, omitting Thursday the 19th. There is a matinee on Sunday, June 22nd, at 3. The final performance, on June 24th, is in aid of the building fund which the Questors are raising to build a bigger and fully equipped theatre, as I have previously mentioned in these notes.

"Edge of the World" is described as "a modern play set in a dilapidated circus and having a strong story, powerful characters, and intensely dramatic situations."

I am told that it has been nominated for the Charles Henry Foyle New Play Award.

E.B.

THE THAMES VALLEY



AMATEUR THEATRE



QUESTORS (EALING) DISCOVER A GRIPPING PLAY OF THE CIRCUS

NEVER have I seen a new play on the amateur stage of greater power or with more interesting characters than Norman Latimer's "Edge of the World" which the Questors Theatre, Ealing, presented throughout last week and up to last night. As I mentioned a fortnight ago it is being nominated for the Charles Henry Foyle New Play Award.

The setting is a dilapidated circus in Ireland. Here we find Kirk Bailey, a great hulk of a man, as dumb as the bear he trains, has been stealing things from the local villagers. At the same time Claire, the young wife whom Kirk has picked from an ignoble existence finds in Bill Drummond, a trapeze artist, the human companionship that Kirk is unable to give her. And over all hangs an air of impending doom.

The play rises to a most exciting climax when the villagers, incensed by Kirk's theft of a horse's carcase for his bear, set fire to the tents.

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AT present the play is far too long for the ordinary commercial theatre, two and a three-quarter hours, including 20 minutes of intervals. The first two scenes, in which the chief characters are addicted to long speeches without much happening, need considerable tightening. But the tension never relaxes and the characters are real human beings, full of conflicting passions, but united in their love of the circus.

I was interested to see John Clemow, formerly of Heston Community Association, playing the sullen trapeze artist. Like the rest of the cast, he gave a gripping, human performance. Ned Gethings gave an astonishing study of the ape-like Kirk, Olga Landiak, with her deep voice, evoked compassion as the unfortunate Claire, and Alexandra Mikellatos, as the haggard wife of the circus owner, had a most unearthly parrot-like cackle. They all showed what amateurs can do when given the chance.

But naturally the play owed most to the superb direction of Alfred Emmett. The fight, when the villagers throw themselves on Kirk was brilliantly managed. The setting, the atmosphere, the lighting, the noises off—birds singing, owls hooting, dogs barking and the crowd shouting—were all extremely effective. It was, indeed an occasion in the amateur theatre that I shall long remember.

Middle
County Times
21 June 1952

GAZETTE, SATURDAY

IMPRESSIVE NEW PLAY WITH A CIRCUS SETTING

Questors in "Edge of the World"

On Saturday the Questors gave the first performance of "Edge of the World," a new play by Norman Latimer. The run continues until Tuesday, June 24.

One of my earliest theatre memories (and it was a rare, if not unique, experience) is playing truant with a friend from school to see a London matinee. We bought our tickets and were seated in good time; but the show was finally cancelled, for we were the only two in the audience.

This incident was recalled as I watched the pathetic struggle of Michael O'Donovan to keep his circus going. If he had found an audience of two, one imagined, the show would have gone on. That is what the author means (and the adjective is apt) by the "dilapidated circus," in Western Ireland, where his impressive play is set.

The play's theme is also aptly expressed in this title. The characters live right on the edge of the world; ready to be toppled over by the merest breath of wind. They are the rogues and vagabonds of our time; the very dregs of the circus world, living in a state of constant vacillation between dread and hope; bolstering each other up; and yet dragging each other down in an interminable vortex of despair that must remain hidden behind a mask of showmanship.

O'Donovan, a true-blooded slave to the sawdust ring, has toured his show from town to village for thirty years; and he will do so until he himself is as dead as his "World Famous Circus," with its pathetic nightly overtures to an audience that never comes. The members of his troupe see the futility of the fight, but find themselves tied to the old man by a thread they cannot sever.

A breed apart

There is a silver cord which binds all circus folk. They are a breed apart. The nature of their life leads to widespread inter-marriage: they are truly international and their work, which calls for arduous application from a very early age, often shuts them off from the rest of the world by sheer illiteracy. Thus they are seldom understood by those whom they seek to serve.

It is this misunderstanding, exacerbated by other things, that leads the villagers to raid the circus, burn down the "Big Top," and leave a chaos of embers in their wake. This damage would end everything were it not for the indomitable spirit of O'Donovan, who can only set out again from scratch. The last scene in the play is a shattering experience: depressing to those who regard circumstances as the main enemy of man; but equally exhilarating if one considers man to be the final master of his circumstances.

The production, in the hands of Alfred Emmet, was most effective at the moments of greatest feeling; during the quieter passages when, at times, a certain tenderness showed through the rough and tumble of circus life. On the other hand, the frighteningly real "rough and tumble" towards the end, when the villagers invade the circus and drag off their victim, probably to lynch him off-stage, was an amazing piece of crowd direction.

The setting, designed by Beryl Anthony, was masterly. In spite of having a bear-cage, three caravans, and the covered entrance to the "Big Top," which dominated the sky-line, there was ample room for the action on the stage; and yet the whole picture seemed quite well in perspective without any signs of undue overcrowding.

The acting

Finally, and all too briefly,

of undue overcrowding.

The acting

Finally, and all too briefly, we must mention the acting. A very clever performance of an old harridan fortune-teller was given by Alexandra Mikellatos, who managed to become almost a part of the scenery. Olga Landiak, a new-comer to the Questors, proved herself a particularly capable actress in a difficult emotional part. This was a performance with the stops out; such as one sees all too rarely. We look forward to seeing this actress again.

Ned Gethings played the part of the bear-tamer; a simple, stupid bear of a man, with plenty of brawn but a "gramophone-record brain," which picked up any ideas that were hammered into it hard enough, and later translated them into action. In a part that might easily have become ludicrous, Mr. Gethings managed always to be so right that it was horrible to watch him.

The part of O'Donovan was played by Edmund Scrivener. It would be easy to write a complete article on this part alone, to explain just why I feel he was wrongly cast. Suffice it to suggest that Mr. Scrivener is essentially a lightweight actor; whereas O'Donovan calls for a heavyweight performance. This has nothing to do with the physical size of the man. It is the spirit of the part that was at odds with the actor's natural talents. O'Donovan should dominate the circus, in spite of the fact that his part is relatively small, and he should give the impression of having dominated for thirty years. This calls for an actor with quite different attributes from those of Mr. Scrivener.

Other parts were played adequately by David Lorraine, John Clemow (somewhat more than adequate), Anthony Holloway, Thomas Pond, Edward Pitt, and the twelve players who joined in the "six-a-side" scrum already mentioned.

PAUL BEDFORD.

Stage

26 Jun 52

THE QUESTORS

"EDGE OF THE WORLD"

On June 14, at their theatre in Mattock-lane, Ealing, The Questors presented a new play by Norman Latimer,

"Edge of the World."

This is true tragedy without sentiment or morbidity. It is a play about a broken-down circus and the circus people themselves, people already broken on the wheel of life. They crawl from village to village in the bog-lands of Western Ireland, playing often without an audience, driven on by the indomitable spirit of Michael O'Donovan the proprietor.

And O'Donovan himself is inspired only by a wealth of dreams and the fierce Celtic determination never to yield. The other characters are equally well drawn, all of them creatures of pathos. Disaster follows disaster. The villagers, irate at the theft of a carcass, steal the horses and set fire to the tent. The bear tamer, a shambling, pathetic creature with the characteristics and mentality of the animals he trains, murders a fellow artist, and his wife, subconsciously seeing this as an opportunity to free herself, stands by without interfering until it is too late. And yet the next morning O'Donovan, his head full of dreams, becomes the man of action again and, fighting the inevitability of fate, whips the remnants of his circus on to the road again.

In his production Alfred Emmet has brilliantly emphasised not only the sadness of the characters, but

also the comradeship of the hopeless, and their efforts to hold on to life.

The acting of Edmund Scrivener as O'Donovan is a highly commendable piece of character work. Perhaps his most successful as well as pathetic scene is where he goes through a rehearsal of his clown routine with the sure knowledge that there will be no audience for the evening performance. Olga Landiak as the frustrated and love-starved Claire, acts with passion, and, at times, with a convincing melancholy, and David Lorraine, John Clemow, Anthony Holloway and Ned Gethings give worth-while performances.

Theatre 5 July 1952

CIRCUS STORY

EDGE OF THE WORLD, by Norman Latimer, Questors Theatre, Ealing

IT is always interesting, whatever its drawbacks, to see the birth of a new play, but particularly so when the choice has been that of an amateur group who might otherwise fall back on the security of already well-known pieces. The setting of Mr. Latimer's new play is the back of a circus tent on a bleak Irish bog rather over-populated by curlews; the characters are a group of artists from the down-at-heel circus. The plot seems a little thin for the furious display of emotion it induces on the stage, but this might be attributed to the Irish temperament.

Kirk Bailey, a weak-minded trainer of animals, most movingly played by Mr. Ned Gethings, steals the carcass of a horse to feed his bear. The irate local villagers demand payment, threatening otherwise to destroy the circus. No payment forthcoming, they close in with the night and burn the big tent to the ground. In the meantime Kirk's wife, Claire, mad with love for the troupe's acrobat, watches Kirk slowly throttle yet another member of the troupe, whose amorous advances she has frequently resisted. When the man is dead, Kirk rushes into the bog, pursued by villagers and dogs while Claire, spurned by her lover and haunted by curlews, volubly blames herself for Ned's deed of violence. There is a last ugly scene involving Ned which is played with the maximum of uncomfortable reality. Over all this perturbation the circus proprietor, well acted by Edmund Scrivener, hovers sentimentally, not quite convincing us by the optimism of his final speech.

It is a pity that the character of Claire could not have been played more as the spirit of evil, the banshee, the witch of the bogs (indeed, what other reason for the Irish fortune-teller's long speech concerning a banshee?) driving men as far as murder by her sinister beauty. This suggestion may be both erroneous and too fanciful, but it would have been theatrically more convincing than Claire's wearisome insistence on her lost purity and thwarted soulfulness. Miss Olga Landiak makes a fine try at this controversial part and Miss Alexandra Mikellatos as the Gipsy fortune-teller, holds our admiring attention throughout the play.

F.H.T.