

Three contrasting plays

M.C. 26/2/71



Pictured here in Harold Pinter's "The Room" are Carolyn Hayfield as Mrs. Sands, Peter Garrett as Mr. Sands and Susan Reeve as Rose Hudd (right)

THREE one-act plays at the Questors Theatre, Ealing, this week by the theatre's student group provides good, all-round entertainment.

The first deals with the Suffragettes and the stupidity of the Army and politicians in coping with them. The second is a kitchen sink drama involving human relationships, and the third is a bawdy, classical comedy reminiscent of television's 'Up Pompeii'.

The first play, George Bernard Shaw's "Press Cuttings," banned when first presented in the 1920's, because of its allusions to living public figures — Kitchen and Asquith.

ROUGH START

This play got off to a rough start at the opening night on Tuesday. Lines were mumbled and beautiful phrases thrown away.

General Mitchener (Tom Jennings) is an authoritarian soldier who treats his subordinates like children. His orderly, Steven Hallmark, rebels when he is subjected to the same treatment.

Mitchener, who says he was trained to obey and not to use his brain, bawls, "shoot them down." Balsquith (Peter Garrett) wonders how to contain his political opponents over the question of the Suffragettes, in a clever illustration of a weak, impressionable premier.

Enter the anti-Suffragettes, the formidable busty, masculine Mrs. Banger (Jeanne Smith) and her partner, the completely feminine Lady Corinthia Fanshawe (Carolyn Hayfield).

GUNPOINT

They hold Mitchener at gunpoint, claiming women don't need the vote. With Mrs. Banger on top of his desk, Mitchener demands his slightly-built orderly shall remove her. Instead, the orderly himself is smartly carried out by Mrs. Banger.

Alone with the beautiful Lady Corinthia, Mitchener hopes to take advantage of her. He is duped into giving her his loaded pistol, but soon finds she is a worse opponent than Mrs. Banger.

Both ladies advocate women controlling the country thought their influence on men and not by getting the vote. Almost forced into marrying Lady Corinthia, Lord Mitchener, to thwart her, proposes to his Irish charlady, Mrs. Farrell. With her bossy manner and authentic accent in this role, Carol Wiseman was the star of the play.

It was a pity Tom Jennings could not overcome his American accent.

STARK

The second play, Harold Pinter's "The Room" is a stark impression of poverty and insecurity. The monologue is full of dull, ordinary phrases and non-sequiters.

Rose Hudd (Susan Reeve) plays a drab, brooding housewife whose only communication with her husband is to feed him.

In Terence's "The Eunuch", Jeanne Smith appeared as Thais, a sexy siren, playing off her suitors. Fully aware of herself, she gave a professional performance. There was clever acting by Peter Garrett as Gnatho, the oily, crafty, hanger-on of Thais's elderly suitor, Thraso (Paul Lewis).

Cleverly made up, Richard Halberstadt was a pitiful, cringing eunuch. Garry Brooking as Antipho, a young man with orange curly hair, sported a superb Grecian hair style.

All three plays were directed by Wyllie Longmore, a credit to any director. Mavis Armit was responsible for the costumes and for the simple easily interchangeable sets.

C.R.

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Students score with group of one-act plays

THERE was not an empty seat on Friday for the Questors' students performance of three one-act plays. They were Shaw's *Press Cuttings*, Pinter's *The Room*, and Terence's *The Eunuch*, translated by Betty Radice.

The producer was Wyllie Longmore. A number of cast changes had to be made from those in the programme.

The Shaw play, of 1909, a skit on the Suffragette movement of those days, was given a lively reading. Tom Jennings was a very suitably pompous General Mitchener (meant for Kitchener) and Peter Garrett, a much younger man, made Prime Minister Balsquith (Asquith) a typical Edwardian politician with Shavian leanings.

"Twenty years in the army and they think they know everything. But twenty years in the Cabinet and you know you know nothing". Bravo, GBS!

Steven Hallmark showed a gift for comedy as the Orderley, though his khaki uniform and anklets seemed to strike a wrong note.

ANTI-FEMINIST

Carolyn Hayfield and Susie Bruce, substitute for Jeanne Smith, as the anti-feminist leaders, were immensely funny. And Carol Wiseman, servant, accepted the General's proposal to the manner born.

The Room seemed the most accomplished performance of the three. A sordid tale but doubtless very real.

Paul Lewis imparted grim sloth to Bert Hudd. Never utter-

ing a syllable while his wife waits on him hand and foot, he makes a brutally savage attack on the blind, coloured Riley when he returns to see them tenderly poised. This was enacted with chilling realism.

Susan Reeve was very sweet, and foolish, as the wife, Rosie. Wyllie Longmore, substitute for Sammy Small, was most effective as the blind man. Carolyn Hayfield and Peter Garrett, coming after the room, were nicely vulgar and common. And Steven Hallmark simulated crippled old age very convincingly.

Perhaps it was not surprising that, with four substitutes, each reading their part, *The Eunuch* lost some of its barb and edge. Particularly in the part of Thais the courtesan.

BRAVE EFFORT

While Susan Reeve, standing in for Jeanne Smith, made the bravest of brave efforts, not without some success, to impart realism to the role, it was incongruous, to say the least, to see a lady of that character reading from a book while charming her suitors.

But "the play must go on" and we all enjoyed it nonetheless.