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## Pirandello's subtle 'six'

Cubism, related to the theatre, is an intriguing concept surely, and one Luigi Pirandello attempts in his comedy, "Six Characters in Search of an Author", which the Questors are presenting from May 18 to 25.

A play within a play, it is set in a theatre, with actors and stage management arriving for a rehearsal, plus a producer and a late leading lady.

But when six unexpected characters, created by the author yet never fully realised by him arrive, the surprising situation is funny indeed.

The Italian nature of the "characters" and "actors" heightens the emotional content of this interesting play.

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\* \* ARTS AND \* \*  
ENTERTAINMENT  
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# Confusion triumphs at the Questors

By ROBERT HEMMING

**LAST week's Questors' production, "Six Characters in Search of an Author", was all a bit mind-blowing.**

Consider: A producer is battling against the odds to rehearse a play when in troop a family of six sad-looking individuals dressed in black who tell him they have a tragedy they would like to stage.

Yet who are they? They are not actors. They are not even people — but characters, tailor-made for the parts they must enact. All they need is an author to write the words which are waiting to spring from their mouths.

For they are the tragedy and the tragedy is within them.

The producer is persuaded and rehearsals get under way with the "real" actors bulldoz-

ing their way through a family drama of perversion, prostitution and near-incest.

A farce is made of the original story as acted by the characters.

Genuine pathos is sacrificed to theatrical adaptation and the result is at the same time touching and amusing.

Once the the characters have begun to unravel their tragedy nothing can or will stop them.

The audience is reminded of Anouilh's "Antigone" where the characters know the terrible fates which await them but also know that nothing can be done to avoid them.

Once the spring of tragedy is wound up it must sooner or later be released with the pre-ordained results.

In Luigi Pirandello's "Six Characters", well translated by Frederick May, the climax of the tragedy comes with the

drowning of a young girl and the suicide of her brother.

All of a sudden two people, or so the actors think, are dead on the stage floor.

The characters walk slowly from the theatre, leaving a stunned and horrified troupe of actors wondering what has hit them.

"This sort of thing has never happened to me before," whines the producer in the understatement of the century.

The play was excellent. It was moving, it was amusing in places and, most important of all, it posed questions.

The players were equal to the play but special mention is deserved by Bernard McLoughlin, who played the producer and Peter Holmes and Ann Bevan, the leading players.

It sounds confusing. And it was — but in a fascinating way.



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## Questors in classic

THE Questors put on an admirable production of that remarkable play by Pirandello, "Six Characters in Search of an Author," last week.

It takes place in 1928 in an Italian theatre and tells of six from a play who assume a life of their own and invade a theatre during rehearsal of another play.

The entire fabric of the theatre and its attempt to represent life breaks down as each of the characters strives for a kind of existence at once necessary and impossible.

Each, by virtue of his independence from his creator, is drawn by his own motivation into actions never conceived by his author. Motive and action are completely confounded.

Produced by Suzanne Gregerson with speed and panache, and in charming period costumes by Frangcon Whelan, the large cast of 12 in the company plus the six characters and Madame Pace unfolded the unusual story with complete conviction.

### TWO BIG PARTS

By far the two largest parts are the Producer, in the Company, and the Father, in the Characters.

Bernard McLoughlin played the former with fine simulation of Italian excitability and passion, whilst John Robb was equally effective in the contrasting rôle of the parent. Jane Dewey also earned much credit as the stepdaughter.

Most of those in the company were supers, sitting in the stalls and awaiting the producer's cues. Though with little to do, and some with nothing to say, it was remarkable how they never ceased acting for one instant. Their contributions to the atmosphere of the play was of paramount importance.

MAURICE REEVE.

M. day CT.

24 MAY 1974

# Characters hide behind their illusions

LUIGI PIRANDELLO'S play *Six Characters In Search Of An Author* can be a crashing bore if performed incompetently, but The Questors Theatre Company is doing an excellent job of entertaining its audiences this week.

First produced in the early nineteen-hundreds this philosophical play questions our ideas of reality, illusion and identity.

Still avant-garde in its con-

cepts of production, the play is a forerunner of Samuel Beckett's techniques of conveying abstract thoughts such as what is reality, what is illusion, through concrete images acted out on the stage.

Anyone who has seen Beckett's *Waiting For Godot* will see the similarity to *Six Characters*.

The concept of a play within a play is as old as Shakespeare but this is much more revolutionary.

The setting is a theatre with actors and set-men getting ready for rehearsal. Six characters arrive claiming they

have been created by an author and then abandoned.

They are looking for an author to complete their lives and suggest to the producer and his cast that they will perform the parts they know, the "actors" can take their parts and a play can be written from that.

## ACTOR'S TWISTED STORY

It all sounds terribly complicated, but Pirandello's brilliance shines through this production.

The characters start to perform and a sordid, twisted story begins to emerge with much comment by the "actors."

The father has abandoned his family, his step-daughter has become a prostitute who he has tried to purchase at a later date, not recognising her.

The mother enters just as the scene begins to become intimate. There is much agony and soul-searching.

The father wants to explain and confess. The step-daughter wants to punish. The mother lives in despair while her older son holds himself aloof and her younger children say nothing.

The "actors" take the parts of the characters and the characters are shocked to see

themselves portrayed differently from what they had imagined themselves to be.

There is comedy as well as tragedy in this play, and much thought-provoking dialogue.

John Robb as the father and Jane Dewey as the step-daughter are excellent counter-foils of remorse and hatred. Both are believable and empathetic.

Francis Martin plays the abandoned mother with just the right amount of despair. Another brilliant touch by Pirandello — an abandoned mother in an abandoned play.

Gately Freeman is the aloof son who agrees with the unseen author "who didn't want us to go on stage."

## PERFECT ILLUSION

Everybody can't be mentioned individually because the cast, under the excellent direction of Suzanne Gregerson, is so large, but in a play as complicated as this everyone has to be perfect or the illusion will be shattered.

Not one member of the cast of 19 seemed out of place and the illusion of actors playing rejected figments of an unseen author's imagination became reality, for a time at least.

R.S.



21 MAY 1974

## Pirandello puzzle play

The work of Luigi Pirandello, the formidable Italian dramatist, seems to be arousing more general interest since Rex Harrison decided to have a bash at his enigmatic "Henry IV."

There's a little-known piece of his called "Tonight We Improvise" in the current Chichester Festival season and his best-known play, **Six Characters in Search of an Author** is play-

ing at the Questors theatre, Ealing, this week.

"Six Characters . . ." is a fascinating puzzle of a play in which Pirandello juggles with his theories on illusion and reality like a man with six arms.

The idea for the play came to Pirandello after he had been haunted for many years by six characters, for whom he could not find a suitable "vehicle," to use a theatrical expression.

At length he decided to write a play about six ready-made characters who are looking for an author to write them a play and thereby justify their existence.

In desperation they persuade a producer to let them act out their own drama while someone takes down a verbatim report to serve as a script.

But when they see it performed by actors, whose ap-

pearance and interpretation differs from their own, they are greatly disillusioned.

Pirandello's way of conveying abstract thought through concrete images has been used to considerable effect also by Samuel Beckett in "Waiting for Godot."

At its simplest, "Six Characters" is the drama of a play taking shape in a playwright's mind—a play in the making.

But it may also be interpreted at a deeper level, as an allegory about the conflict between art and life.

Suzanne Gregerson has directed the Questors' production and a strong cast includes Frances Martin, who appeared in "The Price" at Hampton Court theatre last month.