



QUESTOPICS

THE QUESTORS THEATRE · MATTOCK LANE W5 5BQ · 567 0011 · BOX OFFICE 567 5184 · MAY 1989 · No. 311

The Playhouse May 15 - 22

THE SEAGULL

by Anton Chekhov

in a version by Thomas Kilroy

"An astonishing freshness has been given to Chekhov's *The Seagull* ..." wrote John Barber in *The Daily Telegraph* after seeing Thomas Kilroy's new version at The Royal Court in 1981. Frances King in *The Sunday Telegraph* suspected that the version came closer to Chekhov's intentions than "all those past productions shimmering with poetic tears". And Robert Cushman, writing in *The Observer*, said quite simply "... the best production of *The Seagull* that I have ever seen".

No-one would now seriously question the status of *The Seagull* as a great play, but, like a number of other great plays, its first performance was disastrous, nearly putting Chekhov off writing plays for ever. In writing it, he knew he was breaking new ground: "... I offend dreadfully against stage conventions. It's a comedy with three female and six male roles, four acts, a landscape (view of a lake), lots of talk about literature, little action and a ton of love," Chekhov wrote to a friend while he was working on the play.

The second production of the play was a great triumph, however — with the result that the Moscow Arts Theatre took a seagull for its symbol and have retained it ever since.

So what is the point of taking this classic play and transferring it from Russia to Galway in the West of Ireland? Why mess around with a great play which obviously still works effectively in the theatre? The answer lies in the opening words of this article.

The play is indeed given "an astonishing freshness". The comparison between Russia and Ireland in the late nineteenth century is genuine and illuminating. In place of Chekhov's decaying gentry we are given the Anglo-Irish landlords, whose rents are being withheld by the Land Leaguers under the influence of Parnell and Davitt. Their position is every bit as parlous, their financial situation just as precarious, despite the great tradition they have inherited, living as they do in 'the Big House'.

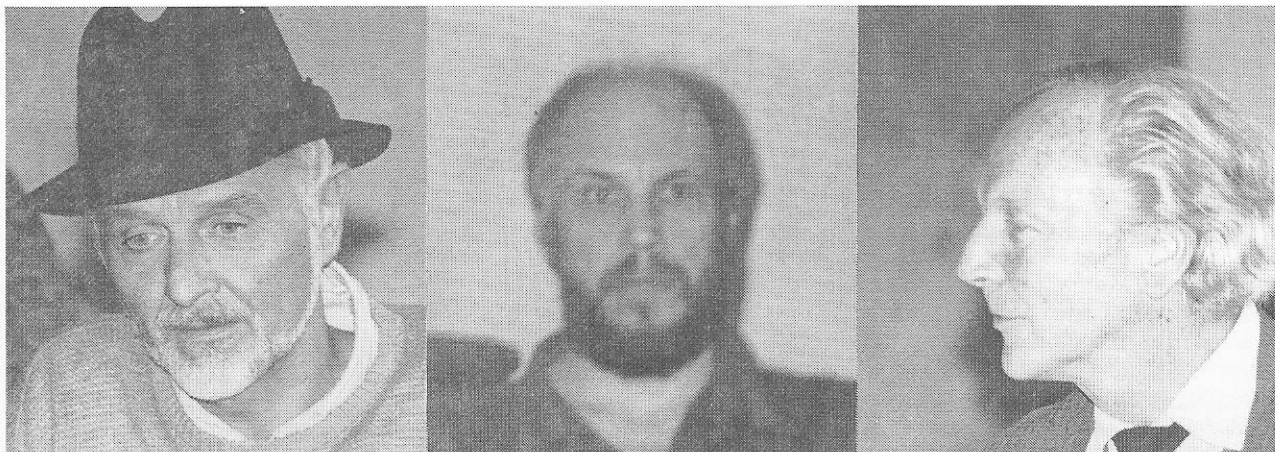
But the parallels are not just a matter of historical interest. Critic after critic pointed out how this version of the play sharpens it up, makes it more immediate and recognisable, and brings out both the comedy and the poignancy with a cleaner cutting edge.

As Chekhov says, not much happens in terms of action, but a great deal happens in the lives and feelings of the characters. James loves Mary loves Constantine loves Lily loves Aston loves his writing (to give the characters their new names). From this 'ton of love' is created a complex web of emotion with joy and despair as its extreme edges.

A very strong cast with a mixture of new and well-known names has been gathered together to make *The Seagull* take wing. John Davey is the director, Ray Dunning the designer.

This is the production we are taking to The Minack in June.

Tickets: Members — FREE. Guests — May 15 - 20, £3.00: May 21, 22, £3.50



Some of the Cast and Director in rehearsal

Photo: Paul Walker

A View from the Back Row

HOBSON'S CHOICE

If you wanted to hire a horse in Cambridge in the early 16th century, you would have found yourself, almost inevitably, dealing with one Thomas Hobson, a liveryman of that city. You would also have found that you had no alternative but to accept the horse that he offered you. You either accepted Hobson's choice or you walked.

Neatly and cleverly does Harold Brighthouse place his character, Henry Horatio Hobson, in the predicament of having no alternative choice, in his play, *Hobson's Choice* (Playhouse 11th/18th March).

In preparation for the task of reviewing *Hobson's Choice* I took the precaution of booking a seat for the Sunday matinée and a seat for the Friday evening performance. Thus, I would obtain a reasonable grasp of what the play was about and in the unhappy event that I could not be as generous as some would like, I could not be accused of having seen it on a 'bad' night.

Having seen the matinée performance I was happy that I had a seat for the Friday but not for my original reason — it was well worth seeing again because it was very well done.

The play, set in Salford, Lancs in 1880, is a humorous, melodramatic romp; not much thought provoking content, but great fun.

Norman Barwick's set was cleverly planned, constructed, dressed and lit. The costumes were excellent and worn with style.

For me, the pleasure was largely the acting performances. Very fine performances from all the cast in a well maintained northern dialect. Roger Lewis in the part of Henry Hobson demonstrated a high degree of skill and confidence. Lorna Duval as Maggie Hobson created a delightful contrast between steely determination and loveable sweetness. Alan Widdrington in his excellent portrayal of Willie Mossop, the worm that was turned, showed remarkable control and subtlety.

A finely cast and well directed piece of many parts, backstage and front, that made for a consummate whole. I enjoyed it — twice!

MICHAEL DAVIS

100 CLUB DRAW

The winner of the March draw was No. 62, J. McIlroy, who wins £88.50. Our congratulations to the winner.

WHY NOT FILL IN YOUR 100 CLUB APPLICATION FOR THE NEXT SERIES, BEGINNING IN MAY, NOW?? IT COULD BE YOU WE ARE CONGRATULATING NEXT YEAR.

Studio Production in June

STUDENT PLAYWRITING COMPETITION — JOINT WINNER!!

THE MIND FOREST

by RICHARD STEADMAN-JONES

Mary Kingsley was a Victorian woman who never married — instead she went to the jungles of West Africa. Her remarkable life story is the theme of this talented new play.

Producer: Anthea Dobry
Cast: Neville Cruttenden, Lisa Day, Rachel Power, Daniel Smith and Ffrangcon Whelan
Dates: Saturday June 10 — Saturday June 17
Tickets: Members and guests: £2.50

THE GRAPEVINE PUTS OUT MORE SHOOTS

"Good wine is a good familiar creature if it be well used." If you agree with Iago, then The Questors was the place to be recently.

Alan Chambers that most congenial of Wine Committee Chairmen, organised the first of what is hoped will be many wine tastings and Michael Lo of Fullers provided the expertise. Mr Lo clearly relished his subject and had the knowledge, wit and enthusiasm to treat us to a very enjoyable evening. We tasted ten wines, mostly in contrasting pairs from the same grape varieties, and I found it interesting to compare, for example, a Chilean Cabernet Sauvignon with a nice Claret. None of the wines was expensive, except perhaps the claret, and we had the opportunity to place an order at an attractive discount.

At the end of the evening there was a warm consensus for having more wine-tastings at The Questors and Mr Lo will be delighted to oblige. He will try to comply with requests for particular themes.

ALAN McGLYNN



Alan Widdrington, Lorna Duval and Roger Lewis in *Hobson's Choice*.

Photo: Paul Walker

SUPPORT THE SUPPORTERS!

Geoffrey Sellman, who organises the sponsorship of our plays, writes ... Recently I had a feedback from a sponsor who asked a customer, "How did you get our name?" and received the reply, "I saw that you recently sponsored a production at The Questors".

This is good news for both of us.

It would be very helpful if Questors members could deal whenever possible with firms who have supported us and tell them your reason.

Local names that spring to mind are Barralets (garden supplies) Duffy's Wine Bar (also good food) Merchant and Co (chartered accountants) Sinton Andrews (estate agents) The Studio (fine art suppliers) Yorke Pest Control (self explanatory)

We are indebted to all firms who so generously sponsor us. Let us all put our gratitude to practical use!

A WARM RECEPTION

The Questors is renowned for the warmth and courtesy with which Front-of-House staff greet our patrons.

However, though the warmth and courtesy remain as strong as ever, the numbers extending it are getting sadly depleted.

What about giving up an occasional evening to join this vital team? Volunteers are normally required for only one performance of each play. It's a marvellous way of getting to know other Questors and of making new friends and 'job satisfaction' is high. Even if you don't want to go on the stage it's a super feeling to know you are a vital part of the organisation which is recognised as a model of its kind in the country.

If you are interested in becoming a steward contact Doug Thomas on 997 1940. If programme-selling is more your cup of tea please contact Valerie Blaxland on 423 5541. In either case you will be welcomed into a friendly team.

A View from the Back Row The Student Production of **FEAR AND MISERY OF THE THIRD REICH**

To pick out any single actor in the Student Group's recent Studio rendering of *Fear and Misery of the Third Reich* would be distinctly un-Brechtian.

This talented team sustained such a well co-ordinated collective performance, so full of commitment and enthusiasm from beginning to end that even after three hours I was sorry to see it end.

It was worth missing the aftershow pint to see the Nazi flag torn defiantly from its hanging place, bringing everything to a close with a striking gesture so typical of a cast whose timing and choreography had been virtually flawless throughout.

Brecht, I'm sure, would have approved. In his "Messingkauf Dialogues" he said that in his drama every character had to be as interested in his partner's playing as in his own. He said: "An actor who knows that later on he's going to have to change places with his colleague is likely to act differently if he remembers that he's going to have to represent the victim too."

Surely the success of this group, whether playing oppressor or victim, lay precisely in their Brechtian ability to share the responsibility of the action through a general sensitivity and adaptability to the requirements of major and supporting roles alike. There were no comfortable parts to sink into. One minute you had to think yourself into an SS Officer whipping a prisoner in a concentration camp, the next you were a prisoner returning from a camp with a face strained by torture. But torturer or

tortured, all were victims of the same charade, the same misery in Brecht's eyes.

Much credit must go to director Helen Walker for inspiring a well-disciplined performance while enabling the breadth of character and talent within this cast to breathe.

Nothing seemed overstudied or dictated and each actor was able to play to his or her full strengths.

The set by Jenny Richardson and the costumes by Pauline Nixon and Grace Craddock thoughtfully balanced the aggressive boldness of violent Nazi colours with the drab decor a 1930's Germany of sunk in the soul-destroying sobriety of the Depression.

Though every student must be commended there were some moments which stood out particularly. Tiny Kahlon's "Jewish Wife" monologue revealed great poise and a sense of knife-edge realism which made a difficult part captivating. Alan Kilbey and Jonathan McGuinness were notable in the Chalk Cross scene for an almost Pinteresque flirtation between comedy and menace. Amy Lake and Jacqueline Defferary were hilarious in a brief but telling duo as two Hitler youth boys awaiting news of the bombardment from Spain. And Miss Defferary's lament over a lost brother in a following scene seemed to take even her co-actors by surprise with its heart-rending vehemence denouncing the regime.

The music by Nic Mehew, all the more dramatic for live performance, gave a great deal to the folky chorus-like interludes and added some spine-chilling background effects to what, for all its comic brevity and lyricism, was a chilling piece of drama. Who can imagine this really happened to millions of ordinary German people? After this performance it will be something that is difficult to forget.

ANDREW HUMPHRIES



The Student Cast of *Fear and Misery in the Third Reich*. Photo: Paul Walker

REHEARSED PLAY READINGS

Sunday, May 14th

PASS IT ON

by Renée

Directed by Howard Shepherdson

Feminism is alive and well in the New Zealand Theatre!

The play celebrates the role of working-class women during social unrest. "I am interested in writing good roles for women, about women we don't see on the stage, but who are all around us".

Sunday, May 28th

LOVERS' VOWS

by Mrs Inchbald (1798)

The notorious play whose rehearsals come to an abrupt end in *Mansfield Park*. Tremendously popular in its time, Jane Austen is thought to have seen it in Bath in 1806. The playwright, famous in her time as an actress, novelist and beauty and a close friend of Kemble, Sarah Siddons and William Godwin, was described by her literary executrix as 'the cleverest self-educated woman who ever lived'.

The reading will be combined with some dramatised excerpts from *Mansfield Park*.

Directed by Sue Solomon

Monday, June 5th In the Shaw Room
(NOTE change of day!)

R. U. R.

by The Brothers Capek

The classic which introduced the word *Robot* to the world.

Directed by Tim Leandro

Sunday, June 11th

THE BELLE'S STRATAGEM

by Mrs Hannah Cowley (1780)

Doricourt, the hero of Mrs Cowley's play is ultimately forced into an acceptance of his real emotions by the contrivances of the heroine, Letitia, who refuses to marry a man who does not truly love her.

Directed by Gillian Kerswell

Sunday, 18th June

THE CHANGING

by David Lewis

Hilarious sex comedy.
Gentlemen, attend if you dare!!

Directed by Brian Ingram

Sunday, 9th July

A PLAY BY A QUESTORS AUTHOR!

COUNTING ON JIMMY

Between the first flush of wedded bliss and the final flush of convenience there's always the child to bridge the gap in a marriage. But can Martin and Lucy count on little Jimmy . . . ?

Come and discover for yourselves in this warming comedy.

Written and directed by Kevin Madley

ALL PLAY READINGS BEGIN AT 7.45
MEMBERS AND GUESTS FREE

Studio Production in May

WHITE NIGHTS and DOSTOEVSKY

A fascinating twin bill with an adaptation by Keith Miles of Dostoevsky's famous story and a play on Dostoevsky himself by the same playwright.

Directors: Michael Gerrard and Alan Widdrington
Dates: 6 - 13 May at 7.45pm
Tickets: Members and Guests: £2.50

The Playhouse in June

THE ALMAS

by DAVID MOWAT

Belief, even circumstantial evidence, has it that there still exists in the remote mountain regions of Central Asia a sub-human species known as the Almas.

Supposing this to be true, David Mowat brings a female of this species into a small-town twentieth century home and examines the effect on the family relationships. The results are comic, thought-provoking and disturbing.

Cast includes: Howard Benbrook, Sheree Clapperton, John Downs, Anne Sawbridge, Leela Selvon, Jane Westrop and Mark Webb

Producer: David Mowat

Designers: Tony Godel

Dates: Tuesday June 6 to Saturday June 10

Tickets: Members FREE. Guests: June 6, 7, 8 £3.00
June 9, 10 £3.50

**THIS PRODUCTION IS SPONSORED BY
DUFFY'S WINE BAR, PITSHANGER LANE**

Second Playhouse production in June

JOINT WINNER OF
THE STUDENT PLAYWRITING COMPETITION

WAR STREET SERENADE

by KATY LOUISE DEAN

Director: Paddy O'Connor

Designer: Brad Askew

Dates: 17, 18, 20 - 24 June

Tickets: Members FREE.
Guests: 17, 18, 20, 21, 22 June £3.00
23, 24 June £3.50

THIS PRODUCTION IS SPONSORED BY WATERSTONES

DIARY

* Box Office open 6.45—8.45pm

** Box Office open 2.30—3.15pm

§ Box Office open 6.45—8.00pm

Please note: The Box Office is open for telephone bookings and personal callers only between these times.

May			
Wed	3	8.00	New Members
Thur	4	—	
Fri	5	—	
Sat	6§	7.45	WHITE NIGHTS
Sun	7§	7.45	WHITE NIGHTS
Mon	8*	7.45	WHITE NIGHTS
Tue	9*	7.45	WHITE NIGHTS
Wed	10*	7.45	WHITE NIGHTS
		8.00	New Members
Thur	11*	7.45	WHITE NIGHTS
Fri	12*	7.45	WHITE NIGHTS
Sat	13*	7.45	WHITE NIGHTS
		7.45	THE SEAGULL
Sun	14**	3.00	THE SEAGULL
		7.45	Rehearsed Reading
Mon	15*	7.45	THE SEAGULL
Tue	16*	7.45	THE SEAGULL
Wed	17*	7.45	THE SEAGULL
		8.00	New Members
Thur	18*	7.45	THE SEAGULL
Fri	19*	7.45	THE SEAGULL
Sat	20*	7.45	THE SEAGULL
Sun	21	—	
Mon	22	—	
Tue	23	—	
Wed	24	8.00	New Members
Thur	25	—	
Fri	26	—	
Sat	27	—	
Sun	28	—	
Mon	29	—	
Tue	30	—	
Wed	31	8.00	New Members
June			
Sun	4	7.45	Promise Auction
Mon	5	7.45	Rehearsed Reading
Tue	6*	7.45	THE ALMAS
Wed	7*	7.45	THE ALMAS
		8.00	New Members
Thur	8*	7.45	THE ALMAS
Fri	9*	7.45	THE ALMAS
Sat	10*	7.45	THE ALMAS
		7.45	MIND FOREST
Sun	11§	7.45	MIND FOREST
		7.45	Rehearsed Reading
Mon	12*	7.45	MIND FOREST
Tue	13*	7.45	MIND FOREST
Wed	14*	7.45	MIND FOREST
		8.00	New Members
Thur	15*	7.45	MIND FOREST
Fri	16*	7.45	MIND FOREST
Sat	17*	7.45	MIND FOREST
		7.45	WAR STREET
Sun	18**	3.00	WAR STREET
		7.45	Rehearsed Reading
Mon	19	—	
Tue	20*	7.45	WAR STREET
Wed	21*	7.45	WAR STREET
		8.00	New Members
Thur	22*	7.45	WAR STREET
Fri	23*	7.56	WAR STREET
Sat	24*	7.45	WAR STREET
Sun	25§	7.45	Celebrity Concert
Mon	26	—	
Tue	27	—	
Wed	28§	7.45	Music Hall
		8.00	New Members
Thur	29	—	
Fri	30§	7.45	Music Hall
July			
Sat	1§	7.45	Choral Concert