

The Questors Theatre Archives

Questories

10th New Plays Festival

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Impressive Saunders work opens Festival

THE NEW James Saunderson's play "The Borage Pigeon Affair", which opened the Tenth Questors Play Festival at Ealing on Saturday last, certainly got the Festival moving with a good work. This is Mr. Saunderson's first full-length play since "A Scent of Flowers" and is, to me, a great improvement on the "in-between" work like the recent one-act "Neighbours". "Borage Pigeon" is a play which successfully manages a marriage between a, various selection of writing styles and which shows influences from John Arden's "The Workhouse Donkey" through Brecht to "The Ruling Class".

The plot is concerned with a local "problem" which is initially created by a small-time intellectual and is then inflated by the press and television. The message here is that the organs of information we have today not so much inform as create information when they have none and create problems. Borage's problem is pigeons. But they are not just pigeons, for Mr. Saunderson uses them to stand for all prejudice, though, most notably, the prejudice against colour. This is finally pointed in a speech by a little Hitler man which shrieks against the pigeons and ends with a fanatical cry for their destruction—and how this reminds one of current trends and policies of certain British politicians.

REACTIONS

The local townsfolk give reactions to their problem and this is especially well shown in a speech in which a landlady talks of pigeons and says that they are increasing in numbers all the time and ends by saying that "the blacks are getting blacker". She'd had a coloured lodger once but the neighbours had objected. She ignores the fact when it is pointed out to her that she is a neighbour too; shades here, in fact, of the "Neighbours" play. A fine edge to personal hypocrisy.

The large company acted well together and, under Bill McLaughlin's direction, kept the play vigorously alive and constantly moving. Notable performances came from Ann Bevan, Mary Jones and Laurence Irvin.

Disappointment

MALCOLM QUANTRILL'S "The Appointment", the second play in the Questors Ealing New Play Festival, opened on Sunday last and, after the success of the James Saunderson's play on Saturday came as a great disappointment. Both plays examine social values but whereas the Saunderson play is constantly alive and interesting the Quantrell is static, boring and never actually takes on any vestige of life. Mr. Quantrell's play is not even acted with the same conviction and style which helped distinguish "The Borage Pigeon Affair", and the actors seemed to lose their lines rather a lot.

The sad thing about this play is that the author has some interesting ideas that are never put across at all forcefully. At times the play becomes so tedious and convoluted that it is almost impossible to follow. The plot is involved with a Preservation Society which, basically, wants to preserve the whole of Old Society intact. The members of this committee are all pretty old and stuffy and the only two young people in the play, Young and Bright, have so many ties with them that it's obvious that even they will do little actually to help the New Society. Here, in fact, we have a confrontation between middle-aged and elderly complacency and youthful apathy.

P.W.B.