

The Questors Theatre Archives
Questories
New Plays Festival
12th Festival 1971

THE STAGE AND TELEVISION TODAY

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QUESTORS FESTIVAL

A SECTION of the programme of the Questors New Plays Festival listing the works presented at these events since their inception in 1960 serves as a happy reminder of many exciting evenings which, in turn, engenders a philosophical attitude towards those which were far from stimulating.

So far as the first two evenings of the 1971 Festival are concerned, such philosophy comes in very handy for, at the time of writing, there has been nothing to suggest that this is a vintage year at Ealing.

David Shellan, the author of many plays so excellent as to make one wonder why he is not better known, has given himself the hazard of dramatising history in "**The Last Emperors**," presented on June 19, which depicts the downfall of the Byzantine Empire.

TENSIONS

Events taking place in Constantinople between 1430 and 1453 are of necessity somewhat sparsely documented although the general outline is clear. Mr. Shellan must have had an interesting time constructing three dimensional characters from the events which took place under their control and the international tensions between the Pope and the Emperor John VIII ; but to the beholder this comes across as a piece of gymnastic scholarship more to be admired than enjoyed.

This is largely because, from the stage point of view, this is a badly constructed play consisting of very many, often very short, conversations which while they make their contribution to the story, diminish one's interest in it. This type of construction, so admirable on television, can never be made to work in the theatre although Peter Anderson, the director, has done his best with it and John Rolfe's designs set the scene well.

The second play, "**John**," presented on June 20, is far from being David Mowat's best play and further suffers from having the author as director. An outsider might have had the courage to cut this boring tale from the three hours and five minutes scheduled for it to more wieldy proportions.

The John of the title is a catatonic drop-out, though from just what is a mystery about which one soon ceases to care. Apart from a visiting girl-friend whose appearance of common sense is nullified by her continued presence in such a scene, his family consists of a rather boring uncle, a dim-witted and sinister father and a sister who is simply dim without any relieving factor. Mother has mysteriously gone missing and one can only commend her good sense as these abysmal people chat, long and repetitiously about this and that with occasional passing and unquestioning reference to somnolent John.

Two events roused the audience from its torpor; one was the kitchen door suddenly deciding to open the wrong way; the other, a long and quite irrelevant in-joke about the amateur actor's attitude to his chosen hobby.

L.G.S.