

The Questors Theatre Archives
Questories
New Play Festivals
13th Festival 1972

AMATEUR STAGE

August 1972

THE TIME-KEEPER, by Tony Gariff. 2m., 1f. *TIME, LIFE, SEX AND YOU KNOW WHAT*, by James Hepburn. 7m., 2f. (doubling). Questors Th., London. W5.

This double-bill provided the third production in the Questors' New Plays Festival (the first two were reviewed last month).

The Time-Keeper is in fact no more than a short curtain-raiser, about a young man, obsessed by the mechanical perfection of chronometry, who applies for a job with the largest firm in the world which handles timepieces. He is interviewed by an older woman, and an ambivalent relationship develops between them, with suggestions of an Oedipus complex. An interesting piece of writing, in a minor key, and a promising first play from a young member of the Questors. Though rather short even for a one-act festival, it could prove an acceptable piece for a club night or exercise, or, as here, for a curtain-raiser to a longer piece which requires a filler to provide a full evening's programme.

Time is also the obsessive opening sequence of **Time, Life, Sex and You Know What**, a revue-type series of sketches which the author sub-titles "All Kinds Time", "One Kind Life", "Six Times Sex" and "You Know What"—which gives an indication of his enjoyment in playing around with words, sometimes with flashing brilliance, but too often with boring, confusing, philosophising self-indulgence. One can try to read some link between these episodes, but, apart from treating of vast themes of Life, Death and What's It All About (You Know), I feel it is stretching parallels beyond the author's intention to imagine any real connecting link. Presiding overall is a Japanese ring-master (which introduces a theme of Occidental v. Oriental conceptions of Life and Death), and producer Cecil Hayter gave full rein to his imagination and the theatre's technical resources with a background chorus of gymnastic figures on frames—which enhanced the visual spectacle and impact, but added little to the content or meaning of the episodes, though perhaps it did cover up certain textual deficiencies. The most successful sketch concerned bestiality with a hippo—a revolting idea, but handled so skilfully, with a "Frosty" mike commentator, that it was hilarious without being shocking.

This is James Hepburn's second piece for the stage, the previous offering, **Poor Dumb Animals** at last year's Questors Festival, also being episodically obsessed with the animal kingdom.

This is the kind of experimental, original writing for the theatre which perhaps only such a Festival could try out. It divided the audience diametrically—it was impossible to be neutral in one's reaction: it creates either a love or a hate relationship, with in this instance the majority verdict towards the latter. The author is obviously an original talent, and discipline is perhaps a word which would stultify this—but possibly a little lesson in economy from the preceding piece would not come amiss.

As one has come to expect from the Questors—a first-class piece of production, staging and acting, though one has some lingering doubts as to the luxury of lavishing so much on so little.

R.S.