

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

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PLAY BY JAMES SAUNDERS WAS BEST IN FESTIVAL

BY far the best thing to come out of the Questors' 1972 new plays festival was **Hans Kohlhaas**, by local playwright James Saunders.

For some reason the Questors chose not to present it in their main auditorium, but in the Stanislavsky Room, normally used for rehearsals.

Because of the cramped conditions, costumes props had to be kept to a minimum and one felt that the play might have been a lot more effective, given the full treatment.

The play is in fact taken from a 16th century German novella about a horsedealer's passionate quest for justice after one of his horses has been claimed by a member of the aristocracy.

Its purpose is to show how a tiny act of injustice, such as this, can blossom into a full-blooded revolution, given the determination and passion of a man like Hans Kohlhaas.

'BRECHTIAN'

The critic of the Guardian, Michael Billington, a frequent visitor to the Questors' theatre in Ealing, described Mr. Saunders' play as "one of the most Brechtian plays we've seen in a long time."

It is certainly a formidable piece of narrative, with political as well as dramatic significance.

A previous contribution by James Saunders to the new plays festival, "**The Borage Pigeon Affair**," which also concerns the escalation of a local problem, is being revived by the Richmond Fringe Group.

TRAINING

Productions at the Questors have always been worthy of note, and so is the group's school of training.

It was in 1946 that the Questors' first formal student group was formed to train young actors to work in this amateur theatre. In the 25 years since then it is estimated that over 500 actors have passed through the course.

Some have gone on into the professional theatre, others have moved away to continue acting activities with drama groups in other parts of the country, and many have stayed to work in Ealing's most famous of amateur theatres. Indeed, many of the leading actors at the Questors have graduated from the student group.

To mark this quarter-centenary, a reunion party will be held at the Questors' theatre on Saturday, July 22nd, following the final performance of the production by the current second-year group of Lorca's **The House of Bernarda Alba** with N. F. Simpson's **A Resounding Tinkle**. Alfred Emmet, who has been director of studies of the student group since its inception, would very much like to hear from any ex-student and hopes to see as many as possible at the reunion.

Meanwhile, applications are being invited for the new course starting in September. The course is a two-years part-time course of evening and afternoon classes and is run under the auspices of the Borough of Ealing education committee.

Subject to a minimum age limit of 17 years, it is open to anyone to apply and previous acting experience is not necessary. All applicants are invited to an interview and informal audition and a selection is made of about 20 to 24 to form the first year group. At the end of the first year course a selection is again made for the second year group, which usually consists of about 12.

SERIOUS

In choosing members of the group, the Questors are looking not so much for accomplishment as for potential talent which maybe developed in the course of training. But an essential quality in all successful applicants is enthusiasm and a preparedness to take the work seriously. The Questors take the view that training to act in an amateur theatre is as serious a matter as training to act in the professional theatre, although naturally the scope is much less in a part-time activity.

One of the great advantages of the Questors' course is that it is so closely integrated with an actual working theatre. The students are part of the theatre and work in a theatre atmosphere. They have opportunities to work back-stage in the theatre's main productions with occasionally a chance to "walk-on" or take part in crowd scenes. This adds a particular zest to the work and also provides a specific aim for the student—to qualify for membership of the main acting group of the Questors.

A prospectus of the student training course and particulars of other young people's groups organised at the Questors may be obtained from the Administrator, Questors' Theatre, Mattock Lane, Ealing W5 5BQ (telephone 567 0011).