

The Questors Theatre Archives
Questories
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THE REVOLUTION THAT NEVER WAS

THE LAST of the Questors' New Plays, Crincum Crancum, was very far from the least. It had a cast of 20, many of whom played several parts, and its subject spanned 20 years of English history.

A veritable epic and certainly the most impressive play of the festival, both as regards production and performance.

The setting was England in the years after the French revolution, when it looked for a time as if we were in for a similarly bloody revolt.

According to John Norman, the playwright, the nation was divided up into wealthy, civilised folk, seemingly unaware of any unrest, and those fearful of imminent disaster, either by its own volition or by the efforts of would-be revolutionaries.

Political attitudes were hopelessly polarized. You were either for "the revolution" or for the status quo. There was no middle path.

At least it was not advisable to take a middle path, although the central character (hardly the hero) of the play was stuck in the middle, sympathising with the revolutionaries yet inextricably tied up with the gentry.

Feeling trapped by his situation, he was inexorably drawn towards violence, though utterly ill-equipped for it by instinct or experience. The whole situation was, for him, as unreal and frightening as a nightmare.

The most striking feature of the play itself was not its subject matter or construction, inevitably disjointed and fragmentary, but the dialogue, which seemed remarkably true to the period without being at all pedantic or affected.

Mr. Norman created some wonderfully vivid characters, notably the suave, unequally scrupulous judge, lurking like the shadow of death (Tony Worth), the richly humorous Sir John Dineley (Peter Whelan, a superb character study), Laurence Irvin's batty monarch, Peter Sainty's equally batty colonel, and Brian Taylor's supercilious clergyman.

These would have been isolated pleasures had it not been for the cohesion and inventiveness of Robin Duval's direction.

With a huge blown-up policial cartoon as a backcloth, Mr. Duval created an unsettling air of conflict between the affluent society and the increasingly dissatisfied working classes.

Simplicity was the key note and the use of stark spotlighting has rarely been seen to better effect.