

The Questors Theatre Archives
Questories
New Plays Festivals
16th Festival 1975

THE GAZETTE

4 July 1975

REBUILDING THE GARDEN OF EDEN

IMAGINE the end of the 20th Century after a worldwide holocaust. Mankind has undergone mutation—there are no men.

The earth is populated solely by women who have become parthenogenetic.

Still, everything has turned out perfect. Without men to cause destruction, life is peace and harmony. Bees no longer have stings, disease is unknown, the tide does not erode the beach, and clear streams run tranquil by trees which offer their unblemished fruit at arm's length.

Life is idyllic, happy, but boring for five sisters on "The Island."

This unlikely futurist scene forms the opening of James Saunders' play, one of the three in the Questors' 16th New Plays Festival until tomorrow (Saturday).

The play tells of two brothers, portrayed by Tony Barber and David Gower, who have managed to avoid the wrath of women. Taken over by survival lust, women had several generations before eaten all the men.

The men's only knowledge of women comes from vague drawings in the sand, cratched by their late father.

When the boys finally meet the girls, the sisters suffer initial disappointment. The men do not seem to be the dangerous, vicious creatures history makes them out to be.

Commonsense, coupled with languid yearning, prevails—human interest is recreated, heterosexual instincts reawakened and the inevitable problem crops up: five into two won't go.

James Saunders, who has been associated with the festival since its beginning, describes his work as a male chauvinist comedy. But that doesn't mean it is an intellectual piece. The play can also be enjoyed purely as an entertaining story.

The other players on this semi-tropical island are Lorna Duval, Caroline O'Reilly, Jo Arundel, Helen Blatch and Sheila Tiffany. All deserve merit for their convincing portrayals in this unusual comedy.

The other two plays in the festival, "Funland" and "Circuses," are both written by successful authors from past festivals.

During the interval, patrons have an opportunity to view the festival's permanent attraction—paintings by William Barnes; Attic Finds: an exhibition by the Questors wardrobe, and an exhibition of photographs of last year's productions.

R.GRECO

THIS HUMOUR ASSAULTS YOUR SENSES...

James Hepburn's "Circuses," the third play in The Questors Theatre Festival of New Plays, approached "the sketch" type play with a new dimension.

"Circuses", packed with idiotic humour, was made up of two selections of short pieces with one main theme running through—irrationality.

The first half "Magic'n Tragic" was a series of comic scenes in a variety show form. "Rubbish", planted members of the audience shouted out. And they hit close to the mark.

Still, the skits were slick and achieved the gist of American mood humour—that is, if the listener doesn't demand "logic" in his play.

The second half was made up of three main pieces: "Deaf," "Dumb" and "Blind," the themes of which followed their respective titles.

Despite the somewhat comic mood of the evening, the overall undertones were more serious.

LAND OF ILLOGIC

A PLAY focussing on one day in the life of several lunatics, their irrationality implying humour, fell down heavily in "Funland," the second play in the New Plays Festival at the Questors Theatre.

An introduction of wafting Ligetti-type noises should have been a warning to any sane member of the audience to flee but being optimists, all sat through, expecting wonders.

Some nifty lighting spotlights three in-patients—Pythagoras, Mr. X and Uncle, all seemingly in dreamland but actually in Funland, a mental institution.

Vague logic surrounds a series of short scenes, crazy superintendent's office, the common room, a demonstration of patients to a class of visiting medical students and a finale concert of over-grand proportions.

The irrational behaviour of the patients and staff earned a few twitterings from the audience, but the screaming sadness of the situation hits the listener broadside.

It was hard work to keep up with this play. Even though author Dannie Abse has had past successes at the Questors, this avant-garde cacophony of words demands too much from audiences wanting a pleasant night out.

Abse even remembers Coleridge's "The truly comic is the blossom of the nettle ..." But it falls flat like a wet rag. The absurd colloquialisms give way to the kind of poetry only Abse can understand. It becomes trying, even boring at times.

The Questors production is not to be blamed for this flop. The fault lies in the choice of play and the writer, who inflicts excessive demands on his listeners.

Some splendid acting comes from John Wilbourn, Phillip Sheahan, Robin Ingram, Rosemary Parry Jones and Norman Wilkinson. Despite their efforts, this black comedy was disappointing.

With such a wealth of good new plays around, one is slightly astonished at The Questors' "illogical" choice.