

The Questors Theatre Archives
Questories
New Plays Festival
17th Festival 1976

ACTON GAZETTE

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...BUT MAKE A BRAVE ASSAULT ON ARMY SATIRE

Operation Cerberus, the last in a trio of productions staged by the Questors theatre to celebrate the 17th New Plays Festival, is a black-comedy set in an out of the way security post.

Cerberus of course was the mythical multi-headed dog which guarded the entrance to Hades. The security post in this play is guarded by a very Cerberus-like elderly Staff Sergeant whose military record has been mysteriously mislaid.

Staff Hort, Played by Wilfrid Sharp, is a highly pompous and well-read man, adding more than a touch of amusement to the production.

While serving his country for well over 45 years, he feels he has missed out on life's cultural aspects and, to make up for this, he spends hours each night poring over grimy tombs in his spartan cavern. The idea is that he will eventually take his 'A' levels, having already gained five 'O' levels as a result of his industry.

The stage setting for the play is a thoroughly professional one, with mist from the winter moors wafting gently into Hort's room and settling on the archaic sand bags and camp bed which furnish it. The junior staff at the post turn over at a horrifying rate, and the disappearance of various inquisitive officials who take it upon themselves to inspect the post is intriguing.

Operation Cerberus is a gently satirical play, operating on a number of levels and with a good deal of down-to-earth humour.

Particularly commendable is the performance given by John Kearns as Khan, an Indian Private whose knowledge of the English language is not helped by Hort's tendency to launch into obscure quotations, and to use most of the ten-letter words in existence.

The author, Michael Kittermaster, is a retired civil servant who has written more than 50 radio and TV plays. Operation Cerberus, in my opinion, is not one of his best.

The humour which reaches the audience in the first half, begins to wain towards the end. But Questors made a brave attempt to bring out the most from and in between the lines.

Claudia Cooke