

The Questors Theatre Archives
Questories
New Plays Festival
18th Festival 1977

SHEPHERD BUSH GAZETTE

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NEW PLAYS FESTIVAL AT QUESTORS

Claudia Cooke reviews the 18th New Plays Festival at the Questors Theatre which is showing a selection of three world premieres out of a total 200 entries.

The aim of the festival is to encourage new writers, new forms of writing, the actors and the audience. It remains a unique occurrence in British theatre, either amateur or professional.

The third play, "Lykos: the Danger in the Maze" by Paul Ramsey will be reviewed in next week's Gazette.

Shakespeare has it taped and Moriarty has us amused

"EARLY Shakespeare and the Late Marlowe" is a swift and imaginative piece of drama which appeals to its audience in a very direct way.

Author Michael Moriarty, a Questors member for some six years, displays an acute sense of humour in this, his first play.

The young and naive William Shakespeare is married to Ann Hathaway but enjoys a handy fling with Miranda under the pretext of pressing work in London.

The fact that Christopher Marlowe is dead does not stop his frequent appearances on stage, and the passing of years becomes irrelevant as Marlowe is seen mending one of Shakespeare's torn scrolls with a piece of Sellotape!

Paul Collins has a beautifully funny role as Marlowe and he executes it with great expertise.

Simon Surtees is forceful and appealing as Shakespeare, and his general acting is more natural than I have seen at Questors for some time.

Both men show a thorough understanding of this original comedy, and the faultlessness of their lengthy dialogues shows signs of very hard work.

Clifford Overton aroused some real chuckles in the audience with his dual role as Bill Kemp, complete with flowing white clown's outfit, and the distinctly effeminate Henry Wriothsley.

Sue Sotheran managed a strong interpretation of Miranda, and showed versatility when she reappeared as the bossy Lady Wriothsley.

The intrigues surrounding all the characters were supported by the unexpected, and made for an unusual and lighthearted experiment in the world of theatre.

It was certainly a valid contribution to the New Plays Festival and promises a hopeful future for Mr. Moriarty who says he hopes to write more plays in the near future.

Flying in the face of its better predecessor

THE AUTHOR of "Seagull Rising" says of its Chekhov predecessor: "It never quite yields to me its mystery . . . I feel thwarted." And I was disappointed to find this an equally apt description of the modern version by A. E. Ellis.

To begin with, I must beg to differ with the description of Chekhov's "The Seagull." I have found the play oppressive, disconcerting, even ugly, but it is no mystery.

"Seagull Rising," however, which held its world premiere at the Questors theatre on Saturday night, bemused me to the extent of boredom with its plays within plays within plays.

Set in provincial Russia at the turn of the century, it follows the contentions of a mother and son who each hold their respective professions of actress and playwright in great esteem—an unfounded pride, we later discover, which has tragic effects on all the characters. So far so good, it has adhered to the original Chekhov plot.

But, for reasons which escape me, A. E. Ellis has introduced a rather poor element of farce into the play which cancels out the possibility of either real humour or real tragedy.

Bewilderment rears its ugly head among the audience, which sadly but understandably diminished after the second act.

Kostia, played by Peter Field, unhappily lacks conviction in his performance anyway, and Diana Benn overacts her role as mother in a manner which actually detracts from her words.

Her brother Sorin, played by Wilfrid Sharp, is a decidedly capable actor in contrast and provides welcome moments of pure enjoyment for the audience.

Ted Scrivener presents a pleasing country doctor in his role as Dorn, and Ken Ratcliffe endows Tregorin with the ability to make the audience relax and absorb.

On the whole, however, I was disappointed with this contribution to the New Plays Festival.

I would suggest A. E. Ellis has trodden on dangerous ground in this attempt to better an unquestionable classic.