

The Questors Theatre Archives

Questories

Third New Plays Festival 1962

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Questors Festival

THE FESTIVAL of new plays being presented at the Questors, Ealing, from June 16 to 30, includes three separate programmes which between them, cover a remarkably wide range of theatrical experience.

Lydia Ragosin's "The Children of Saturn", which opened the festival on Saturday, is set in St. Petersburg in 1905 and depicts some aspects of the abortive revolution of that year as seen and experienced by a young aristocrat who threw in his lot with the revolutionaries only to be betrayed by them when they saw their plans to be a failure.

The author's father having lived through the historic events on which the play is based earns respect for the knowledge she incorporates into the plot and one cannot doubt the sincerity of her implication that ideals are more valuable than ideas, even if her treatment of them does not compel agreement. Unfortunately, from a dramatic standpoint, she has used techniques more suitable to her customary medium of radio and television and the impact of the play is diminished by its episodic nature and the uneasy shifting of action to and from various small portions of the stage, giving an outmoded rather than a period flavour. None the less, Kenneth Conington, the producer, was able to achieve some good effects by the judicious use of a rostrum.

NO EXCITEMENT

With the exception of Alan Chambers as a revolutionary, Thomas Mercer as an old General and David Lorraine as his servant, the cast added no feeling of excitement to the not very thrilling script.

On Monday, June 18, an outstandingly successful example of theatre-in-the-round was presented in the Stanislavsky room under the direction of Shirley Butler. This was James Saunders's "Next Time I'll Sing to You" after "A Hermit Disclosed" by Raleigh Trevelyan. But this was not in any way a dramatisation of the book; rather was it a play inspired by thoughts arising from having read it. A notable and valuable contribution to the theatre of the absurd, this play is also a prototype for successful writing for the round, although equally skilfully produced, it might have a comparable success in a more rectangular version.

Uproariously funny, and, at the same time, uncomfortably tragic in its exploration and acceptance of man's inescapable solitude, it called forth memorable performances from Lawrence Irvin and Laurence Nixon as narrators, Peter Whelan as a prime mover of events, George Ritchie as the Hermit and Jo Arundel as a whole world of empty-headed young women.

DANNIE ABSE

The final programme of the series consists of two plays by Dannie Abse. "Gone" is a conversation between two men about the woman who was the wife of one and mistress of the other - until she ran away with someone else. Their illusive and elusive exchanges as they try to reach a plane of communication without coming to the point of truth is stamped with veracity and beautifully executed by Ned Gethings and Bob Jones.

"The Joker" is a Jewish play about the more universal problem of a practical joker who hides personal tragedy behind his back-slapping good fellowship. Nat's problem is his hatred of his incurable homosexuality and his sister's unceasing refusal to recognise the situation and cease to try to arrange a marriage for him. Joseph Green was admirable indeed in the central role and the rest of the cast did their best to overcome the difficulty of not being Jewish. The effective production was by Jeffrey Smith and the author.

L.G.S.