

Amateur Stage. June 1963

FESTIVAL OF NEW PLAYS.

Questors Th., London, W.5.

In one programme two plays are by James Saunders, *The Pedagogue* and *Who Was Hilary Maconochie?* *The Pedagogue* is a *tour de force*, described as a monologue and requiring considerable resources from the actor who plays it. Briefly, a theology master is holding forth to his class when The Bomb drops and the play's range is from the opening catalogue of old schoolroom jokes to the shattering ending. The beginning is overlong and the play could be shortened (as could almost all the plays in the Festival), but it is worth many more performances both for the level of writing and appreciation and for the very overt message which it carries.

Who was Hilary Maconochie? is a very different play indeed. Here more truly in the Saunders manner, nothing is overt, the possibilities of interpretation are almost limitless. An elderly woman of the upper classes sits in her suburban home writing her diary. A maid hints at lurid events in the past and links her in some undefined relationship with a female caller. The questions intended to intrigue the audience arise from considering to what extent the events and relationship are imaginary. The dialogue is crisp and often amusing, only occasionally does Saunders produce the undigested chunks of popularised philosophy to which he is often addicted. The weakness here is the maid, who as a Greek chorus, provides a lazy way of making points and providing descriptions that should emerge from the substantive characters.

The third play seen with these two was *Don't Wait for Me* by David Campton. This never got beyond the heights of the living room in which it was presumably intended to be seen (the TV influence). The characters were correspondingly superficial and the writing forcing the actors to strain in their search for conviction.

The second evening offered two plays by William Norfolk, *The Exhibitionists are Among Us* and *Goodness Gracious; is that Really Me?* The former is a short piece with a frightening and powerful conception. A newly married couple move into a nicely furnished cage apparently on an estate of cages. Everyone is exposed to the other's gaze. The husband attempts to leave and is annihilated. The symbolism, is, of course, obvious and the dialogue is really just framework to carry the idea and becomes therefore a little repetitive. The point could be made, however, in half the time.

Goodness Gracious! Is That Really Me? is a much more substantive play altogether. A group of unattached characters (renegades from their nasty real wives occupying an Earls Court rooming house), in order to protect their fantasies, have been in the habit of exterminating intruders who come to live in the house and who introduce dangerous thoughts. The circle is broken by the intrusion of the daughter of one of them and all but two of the group despair on being forced to face the truth. The ending is contrived, but this is in many ways the most satisfying play of the Festival.

The third play in this programme is *The Workout* by Albert Bermel. This is finely written, very funny and, unlike anything else, almost wholly lighthearted. In many ways a most professional piece of writing - it deserves the repetition it is to be hoped it will get.

N. *The third evening of this Festival, a full-length play by Colin Finbow, The Things, will be reviewed next month .- Ed.*