

The Questors Theatre Archives

Questories

Fourth New Plays Festival 1963

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Questors' Festival of New Plays

THIS year's festival of new plays at the Questors, Ealing, which opened on June 8, has not produced anything likely to match the success of "Next Time I'll Sing To You", which was given its première there in 1962.

It is not that the quality of the writing averages out at a lower standard: if anything, the proportion of outstanding work is slightly higher. But there is a larger proportion of one-act plays, which are less likely to be taken up by live theatre managements.

The only full-length play, with which the festival opened, is "The Things" by Colin Finbow, which was commissioned for the occasion.

Mr. Finbow's theme was stated to be the obsession some people have with belongings and the way such an obsession can destroy human relationships. The author has delivered his work in the form of a black, or at least as a very dark grey, comedy and we are shown the destruction of a marriage running through the play, but he has to a disappointing degree obscured his own issue. One emerges at the end of the evening having had much to laugh about, a little to think about but with no clear direction along which to base agreement or argument.

IN THE ROUND

Barbara Hutchins makes very good use of the round in her direction and there is a notable performance from Thomas Mercer as the conjuror who came to entertain and stayed to be entertained in the other sense, until he had secured himself free bed and board for life. There is a good study from Dorothy Boyd Taylor as the bride to whom the breakfast was more important than the wedding.

The remainder of the festival is devoted to one-act plays, of which "Don't Wait For Me" by David Campton gives, at least to people who have encountered his work before, the most disappointment. Abandoning - let us hope only temporarily - the "comedy of menace" for which he has become known, in favour of a straight play of character, he has succeeded only in giving us a somewhat old-fashioned type of women's magazine story about two people whose lives were wrecked by a young man's willingness to everything his lady-love said she wanted instead of what she meant she wanted. Mary Jones and Myles McDowell did well in the leading parts.

SAUNDERS

John Miles-Brown, who directed that play, gave us in the same programme two works from James Saunders, which he handled in a masterly manner.

"Who Was Hilary Maconochie?" explores the mental processes of two elderly ladies, beautifully played by Dorinne Ingram and Alexandra Mikellatos, who are held together by ancient memories, hatred and rivalries for the love of one man. It is at least revealed, through the Sabina-like machinations of the maid - well characterised by Sandra Turner - that in fact the whole matter has become sheer habit, as neither of them can even remember what the man looked like.

"The Pedagogue", also by James Saunders, is perhaps the finest work of the whole festival. It is a tour-de-force for one actor - in this case Lawrence Irvin, who performed it very well. It is the dissertation of a schoolmaster, alarmingly set only ten years into the future, whose preoccupation with the humanities leads him into delivering a long and confused lecture on "all is for the best" and "we must have faith" while his science-minded for the deep shelter and leave him to collapse among some well-devised and very terrifying sound and light effects.

AMUSING

William Norfolk contributes two pleasing works in "The Exhibitionists Are Among Us" and "Goodness Gracious! Is That Really Me?"

The first amusingly makes the point that it is very easy - and perhaps rather advisable - to get accustomed to living in one's own little cage and jeering at one's neighbours through the bars. The second deals at greater length with another form of escapism, for the characters are banded together

under a pledge to believe each other's public images of themselves and to destroy anyone who ventures to cast doubt, no matter how near and dear they may be. Joan Pyle gave a fine performance as a woman who sees her self as the mother she had hoped to be.

EXPOSURE

Albert Bermel's "The Workout" is a hilarious exposure of the American tendency to "sell" religion in a package deal along with something else - in this case, physical fitness. It provides John Howard with an excellent vehicle for his acting.

L.G.S.