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9th New Plays Festival 1968

Middlesex County Times 28 June 1968

NEW PLAY GIVES A FRESH PICTURE OF CHRIST

WHILE not everyone who sees David Yallop's new play, "In Search Of A Man", which forms part of the Questor's Theatre New Plays Festival, will find it entirely credible, it is certain that the vast majority will agree that this extremely well-presented play is of television material, both imaginatively stimulating and highly interesting.

David Yallop, who works for television as an assistant floor manager, has written a quantity of television material, including scripts for the "Love Story," series. To write "In Search of A Man," the author has delved into recent research material concerning the Dead Sea Scrolls. In this startling play he portrays Christ in a guise different from that in which He is presented in the New Testament.

Here, Christ is shown as a political pawn put up by the Essenes and the Zealots who plan to use him as the figurehead of an armed revolt against the Romans. However, things do not quite work out that way, for Christ has other ideas.

To shake the orthodox, Christ is shown as married and as having a son. The miracles are arranged by trickery, by the Zealots, and Christ has to be persuaded to accept the Cross.

While the play has many unusual features and, to be fair, can only be described as an imaginative exercise, it is in no sense irreligious.

The theme is handled with sincerity and sensitivity. The characterisation of the principals was quite unexceptional and all were well-defined.

Some authority to the theme may be gathered from the Dead Sea Scrolls, in that the basic belief of brotherly love was certainly Essenic in origin.

Alan Robinson, as Christ, gave a sincere performance. He was highly convincing and the scene when he cured the paralytic, admirably played by David Lorraine, was superb.

David Gower had the right touch of fanaticism to convey John the Baptist. He radiated conviction and authority.

Ben Keen made a somewhat bucolic Pilate, very unsure of his ability to maintain his position as Procurator. He was ably assisted by his two Aides, Martin Bowley and Michael Noakes.

Neville Cruttenden gave a good all-round performance as the Zealot leader, James, who obviously believed the end justified the means. Barry Woolgar and John Turner supported him well, as Simon and Menahem.

The Essenes were well represented by Neville Bradbury as Father and by Derek Chandler and Harold Thornley as the two Elders.

The play was admirably directed by Michael Custance who used the facilities of the Questors Theatre to considerable advantage.

One slightly odd feature, was that the cast divided itself naturally into a selection of both holy and unholy trinities. There were three Romans, three Essenes, three Zealots, etc. This tended to make for triangular groupings and as the play to a certain extent lacked movement this at times became a little boring.

But the play certainly held the attention of its first night audience, a sell-out, and it received an ovation at the end. It may be seen again on June 30 and on July 5.

W.R.N.