

Middx Counts

Ames 2 March
1952

Students' week at the Questors

"CORINTH HOUSE"

Last Saturday evening the final performance took place by the second year students at the Questors Theatre who had been showing their paces in six performances of "Corinth House," a play by Pamela Hansford Johnson who, incidentally, attended the opening night.

Four of the seven characters had been played by different students on alternate evenings.

"Corinth House" is the name of a domicile; it is one of the half-way establishments, between boarding house and mortuary, for which the term "private hotel" is an elegant euphemism. The residents: remnants of revered respectability, bored and boring lodgers, hapless and hopeless hypochondriacs; all move in that sad state of perpetual isolation which develops in lonely old age. The proprietress, Mrs. Beauclerc, dominates the place with a harsh efficiency, subjecting her guests to the customary intractable "rules"; and the solitary member of the staff is an ubiquitous and cruelly overworked maid, whose name is Nora.

Into this setting the author introduces 32-year-old Madge Donnythorpe, an ex-student of one of the residents, Miss Malle-son. It is established that sixteen years previously Miss Malle-son had occasion to humiliate Madge before the school. The nature of the offence is never made explicit; but the humiliation of the punishment has become an obsession which leads Madge to seek revenge on the retired school-mistress. The pursuit of this revenge is the action of the play; and it makes for a thoroughly effective evening in the theatre.

That gives an outline of the actual play, than which it would seem hard to find less suitable material for a group of students mainly in their late 'teens and early twenties.

The settings, designed by Mar-jorie Golsby, successfully caught the atmosphere of Corinth House, the choice of colours being particularly apt. If the architect lay-out seemed somewhat quaint it is a tenable opinion that the place had developed along familiar lines by the arbitrary knocking of a couple or more terrace houses into one.

Residential

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Among the residents we recall Major Shales, played by David Eldridge with an uncanny accuracy of observation. Make-up, speech, movement, and feelings were combined to create a thoroughly creditable performance. Valerie Lawson played Miss Figgis, a fussy old lady addicted to medicines. This was a conspicuously good effort for a young actress; but, as a performance, it might have been better had it been just a shade less conspicuous—although we were very nearly hoodwinked into believing the portrait was real for all that we knew it was a caricature. Brenda Harvey's Nora was a gem of a performance with both feet solidly on the moth-eaten carpets of Corinth House.

Thus far we have considered the "constants"; those members of the cast who played at every performance. Now we must turn to the rest.

Dogberry maintained that comparisons are odorous; but there are times when the odorous becomes the inevitable, and it would be quite impossible not to draw some kind of comparison between the two interpretations of the main parts in this play. The distinction was remarkable enough that we might almost have been watching different plays altogether.

Carla Craik, on the first night, gave us a Miss Malleson who was quiet, unassuming, and pleasant; but subdued to the point where we found it hard to take much interest in the 'old dear. Against this, Josephine Arundel provided a Madge of far too pleasant disposition for us to accept her quest of a hateful revenge. There were brief moments when a sound technique brought a temporary conviction; but the playing lacked essential inner feeling, and we found ourselves too interested in what she had done sixteen years ago.

Vital quality

In the other cast Margaret Popham gave an admirable portrayal of Miss Malleson, conveying a fine sense of responsibility, a nice perception, and an inner strength that we had missed on the first occasion. In short, she brought the vital quality of maturity to the part, and this made her into a truly interesting character.

Playing Madge, opposite Miss Popham, was Betty White, who proved herself an actress of considerable power. This Madge made her presence felt the moment she came on the scene; and we knew that the play was gathering momentum as it had failed to do before. Here was a woman with a purpose and the ominous power to carry that purpose out. This was a strong performance of intense inner conviction; and it was a surprising thing to find the second visit to a play so much more moving than the first had been.

Apart from these individual distinctions, which were conspicuous, one had a strong feeling that the second cast were more closely integrated into the production. They may possibly have had more rehearsals than the others; it certainly seemed that way.

Others in the cast were Noreen Abley and Ruth Tremayne, who played two other parts on alternate evenings. The production was by Dorothy Dickinson.

PAUL BEDFORD.

Middlesex County Times

19 July 1952

"Corinth House" opening at Questors' to-night

The seventh and final play of the current season opens at the Questors' Theatre to-night. The play is "Corinth House." by Pamela Hansford Johnson, and the run continues until next Saturday with a break on Thursday evening.

The six performances of this play will be given by the second-year students, who have just completed their two-year course of training. In order to enable all of the students to take part in this production there is to be a change of cast on alternate nights; which means that members will have an opportunity to see two different interpretations of the play within the scope of the same main outline.

"Corinth House" is the name of a private hotel in London, and the central conflict is between a retired headmistress and an obsessed ex-pupil. Performances of the play have previously been given at the New Lindsay Theatre, and also on radio and television.

The box office is open at the theatre, and members are urged to apply early for their free tickets. Non-members are invited to write or phone the Theatre Manager (Miss Rena Rice) at the Questors' Theatre, Mattock-lane, Ealing, W.5 (Ealing 5184), from whom all particulars of club activities may be obtained.

The first production of the 1952-53 season, which opens on September 20, is to be a revival of Pirandello's parable, "Right You Are! (if you think you are)."

Middlesex County Times

12 July 1952

Questors to give "Corinth House"

SEVENTH AND FINAL PLAY OF SEASON

The next production at the Questors Theatre, the seventh and final play of their current season, opens on Saturday next, July 19, and will run for six performances, ending on July 26.

The play is "Corinth House," the first play of the distinguished novelist, Pamela Hansford Johnson, and the performances at the Questors will be given by the second-year students, who have just completed their two-year course of training. It is interesting to note that, of the seven parts in the piece, four are being played on alternate nights by different actresses; which means that two distinct interpretations of the play will be given within the scope of the same production.

Set in a respectable London "private hotel," the play has a moving and tense central theme of conflict between a retired headmistress and an obsessed ex-pupil. Performances of the play have already been given at the New Lindsey Theatre and also on radio and television.

The box office is now open at the Theatre, and members are urged to make early application for their free seats in order to avoid disappointment. Non-members may apply to the theatre manager at the Questors Theatre, Mattock-lane, W.5, for particulars of membership and full details of forthcoming events in the Club's programme.