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QUESTORS' STUDENTS' QUARTETTE

'Curtain-raiser' to Community Theatre festival

Last Saturday the Questors' Second Year Student Group put on a programme described as "Four One-Act Plays". This consisted of Act One from Shaw's "Arms And The Man", a scene from Shakespeare's "A Midsummer Night's Dream", W. B. Yeats's "Deirdre", and The Anniversary, by Anton Tchekhov. The last three of these are to be played in the British Drama League Community Theatre Festival, at the Rudolf Steiner Hall, later this month.

Although it may be argued that Act One of "Arms And The Man" and the quarrel scene from "The Dream" are self-contained units, I find it hard to justify using a part of a full-length work as a pseudo one-act play. A snack is quite a different thing from one course of a complete meal, no matter how self-sufficient a plate of soup may appear to be.

Quite apart from this, however, the Act from "Arms And The Man" was played with an intensity for which it was never designed, and the scene from "The Dream" was given an unimaginative, prosaic, flat production that never caught the play's essential charm. The most commendable performances in the Shaw piece were those of Noreen Abley, as Catherine, and Ruth Tremayne, as Louka; Betty White's Raina was technically sound, but her characterisation was too serious. In the Shakespeare scene, Carla Craik and Brenda Harvey did quite nicely as Oberon and Puck respectively; but the only mortal with any vitality was Margaret Popham's Hermia.

W. B. Yeats's "Deirdre" is a masterpiece, based on the

Celtic legend of Deirdre and Conchubar. The theme of ideal love is nobly expressed by fine verse in a framework derived from the Greek classic drama, the main features of which are advantageously used.

The Chorus was aptly handled by Noreen Abley, Betty White, and Brenda Harvey. Deirdre was competently played by Josephine Arundel; and John Howard's Naoise was the outstanding performance of the evening as indeed was to be expected Mr. Howard being an actor of considerable experience compared with the Students, to whose strength his was a welcome addition.

"The Anniversary" should have been a rip-roaring farce, played at break-neck speed. If the rest of the cast had taken their pace from Valerie Lowson, instead of plodding vaguely along at the speed of midday traffic in Oxford street, the desired effect might have been achieved.

In general this was a disappointing evening. With few exceptions performances were too studied, and too tense for comfort. To one of the cast, who need not be named, it should be pointed out, more in sorrow than in anger, that although certain lines may not be remembered the audience does expect to hear those that are. I am reminded of something Norman Marshall wrote in the "Sunday Times" last November, when he said: "I found myself wondering how many amateurs really enjoy acting. They too rarely show much sign of it." Let us hope that these Students will conspicuously enjoy playing at the Rudolf Steiner Hall.

Paul Bedford