

Middlesex County Times

11 July 1953

Questors' students to perform a Cockney comedy

Next Saturday will be the first night of the final production of the Questors' 1952-53 season. It will also be the first London performance of a new play, "**Storm in a Paint Pot**", by Margaret Gibbs, and the run will continue through the following week, with the exception of Thursday, concluding on Saturday July 25.

This play, a vigorous comedy of cockney humour, highlights the strong repercussions resulting from a resident on a Council estate determining to paint her front door a distinctive colour; a typical incident of which the author has made great use.

The play has been given only one previous production, earlier this year, when it was put on by an amateur company in Hove, the author's home town. This single production robs the Questors of the opportunity to add an additional premiere to the worthy list. It would also have been the first time that one of the Student Groups had played a new full-length work. But they must content themselves with the consolation prize of a London premiere, coupled with the distinction of being a play that the Questors have nominated for the Charles Henry Foyle New play Award.

During the seven years of their existence, the Questors' Student Groups have developed rapidly from being simply a weekly class taken by more experienced members, into their present form. There are now two courses in operation under professional instructors. The First Year Group, consisting of about 20 students, has three classes a week; and the Second Year Group, of about ten students selected from the previous First Year Group has four weekly classes - one devoted to the study of movement, one to speech, and two to rehearsals.

These groups start their respective courses in September each year, and a new First Year Group is now being formed to commence next September. Applicants for this are invited to call upon, telephone or write to the Theatre Manager, the Questors

Theatre, Mattock-lane, Ealing W5 (Ealing 5184), from whom a prospectus, giving full details, may be obtained. Membership of these Groups is not restricted to members of the Questors Theatre Club.

The box-office for "**Storm in a Paint-pot**" is now open at the theatre, and members are advised to make early application for their free seats, especially as the number of performances is limited to six as against the normal run of nine nights.

Middlesex County Times

18 July 1953

NICE TO BE HOME AGAIN! Questors' students first night

When one has been abroad, or out of town, for a long time, there is invariably a feeling of relief on returning to London. It is pleasant to find one's self back on the Underground. There is a thrill at seeing the first London Transport bus, usually several miles before we reach the places of familiar sights, but without exception the first thing that really reminds us of London, the London we know so well, yet in which we are strangers when it is a case of directing sightseeing visitors to the Tower, the Palace, the Houses of Parliament or Guildhall. And how many of us can tell the fable of Gog and Magog?

It is good to be back. It is restful not having to look at the sights: it is fun being within the feel, if not the sound of Bow Bells - and that feeling is on each and every London bus with its gay, cheerful Cockney master of ceremonies.

But what has all this to do with the Questors? Perhaps not a great deal. Yet it is with something of this feeling, that it is nice to be home again, that we may look forward to tonight's first night at the Questors theatre in Mattock-lane. Here, after a trans-continental season, at last, we are back home with a Cockney comedy, called "**Storm in a Paint-pot**", by Margaret Gibbs. This is the last production of the Questors' 1952-53 season; and there will be six performances, the run ending on Saturday next. The cast will be the Second Year Students, who have just completed their two-year course, augmented by a few of the main acting members of the theatre.

The box-office is open on nights of performance between 8.30 and 7.30 pm and members are urged to apply for their free seats early in the week, as the short run may mean that late applications will not be met. It is also advisable, of course, to make a point of seeing one of the early performances, for which there are more likely to be better seats available. Applications should be sent to the Box Office Manager, the Questors Theatre, Mattock-lane, Ealing W5 (phone Ealing 5184) and each application must be supported by the membership number of the applicant.

Middlesex County Times
25 July 1953

**THE FRONT DOOR WITH
A DISTINCTIVE HUE**

**Questors' students' big success
in Cockney comedy**

Last Saturday the Questors' Second Year Student Group presented "**Storm in a Paint-pot**". A cockney comedy by Margaret Gibbs. The run of six performances finishes this evening.

It is a creditable accomplishment for an author so to design a comedy that the biggest laugh brings down the final curtain. Especially when there has been no mean ration of laughter throughout three acts. This feat, which Miss Gibbs has admirably brought off sends audiences home completely happy; and a completely happy audience is most likely to forget, or conveniently ignore, some of the duller preceding parts. We may even disregard the fact that the entire action is based on a fallacy.

One of the cleverest touches is the title, "**Storm in a Paint-Pot**", which derives from the fact that Mrs Pratt, a resident on a Council estate, comes across a bargain pot of purple paint, decides to embellish her front door with this distinctive hue. The local Council, with an alacrity that

temporarily spoils the effect, sends her a note, before the paint is dry, pointing out that she must conform to the standard pattern of the estate, which is universally endowed with brown front doors. The ensuing reactions are amusing enough, even though the plot wears a little thin in the middle, and the final thrust in support of individual rights, is quite brilliant. But its nature is not to be divulged, lest its effect be spoiled.

The fallacy, obvious to anyone who has seen some, is that the modern Council estate invariably has as wide a selection of brightly painted front doors as Miss Gibbs brings into her middle scenes, when all the neighbours join forces with Mrs Pratt and paint their doors with more variety than the rainbow can boast, the result being, as one of the characters says, kaleidoscopic! Yet to laugh at restrictions that do not exist is probably purer fun than laughing at those that do; an exercise that is merely a healthy release from the chains of bureaucracy.

Gloriously awkward

The Student cast acquitted themselves admirably. Sylvia Pothan's Mrs Pratt was assuredly the genuine article. The ordinary mother who finds herself inexplicably in the fray in spite of her inclinations to give credit where it may be due. The scene where she quite simply fails to see the Council's case, as presented by Counsellor Clarke, was most admirably done; as also was the gloriously awkward business of posing for the local press photographer.

Margot Shields was equally at home as Mrs Codger a neighbour whom Freddie, Mrs Pratt's "cleveristic" son, aptly calls Mrs Cadger. Here was a ripe character, with a rich vocabulary that included the collector's word "totalitarianism" with all its wealth of associations with a narrow-minded nonconformist Council. Robert Eames gave a reasonable performance as Freddie; but he needs to work on his voice which often tends to slur badly over words.

Jose Rowdon was quite brilliant with her deliciously articulated Miss Cullen, quite unused to life on a Council estate after an upbringing essentially "semi-detached." David Eldridge's Albert Noakes, the rent-collector, always pleading to be accepted as a man in spite of his occupation, trailed off into dullness. Alan Fuller made a commendable job of Councillor Clarke, completely baffled in his attempts to impress Mrs Pratt that the council had as much as a foot to stand on; and Anthony Holloway gave an amusing sketch as the stage reporter.

Other performances included the perfection of Edmund Scrivener's Joe Mullett, the local painter, who doubtless profited most from the extravagant affairs on the estate, notwithstanding his professional disdain of the way the jobs were handled; Gillian Brown's Hon Mrs Daventry, an erstwhile suffragette, still in the battle whenever it was recommenced; Catherine Scrivener's Ada, daughter of Mrs Pratt, married to a "white-collar," who we were thankful never to meet; and June Pond's Hazel, fiancée to Freddie unhappily not comfortably at home in the environment of a Council estate.

Pamela Richards produced soundly, with occasional flashes of notable invention some of which should possibly be credited to the stage directions of the author. But we cannot overlook the occasion when Freddie reads "letters to the Editor" from the front page of the local newspaper: actor or producer should have known better. The setting, designed by Dennis Farr, served the purposes of the piece by giving us a clear view of the controversial door, through a gap in the living room wall; and that, really, is all that the play demanded. The furnishings in the living-room were particularly right, and the colours were obviously selected with the correct imaginative care.

PAUL BEDFORD

The Stage
2 July 1953

THE QUESTORS
"STORM IN A PAINT-POT"

On July 18 the Questors, Ealing, second-year student group presented a new play by Margaret Gibbs.

The battle between bureaucratic government—even if it is only local—and the individual's claim to live unhampered by senseless regulations forms the basis of this humorous play, which is notable for clever characterisation. The council ordains that all the doors of the houses on its new estate must be painted a regulation brown, and Mrs Pratt and family join forces with the other tenants to defeat this unnecessary ordinance.

Mrs Pratt, the glorified "Mum" of this type of domestic comedy, is played by Sylvia Pothan with dignity and unobtrusive authority, and Robert Eames as her son, is outstanding with an exuberant performance. There is a clever study of a snobbish married sister by Catherine Scrivener, and also notable are Edmund Scrivener as a local jobbing painter and Gillian Brown as the wealthy but eccentric occupant of the "big house" in the community. Pamela Richards produced with a setting by Dennis Farr.