

Middlesex County Times

6 February 1954

Four plays open to-night at the Questors Theatre

A special programme of one-act plays opens at the Questors Theatre, Mattock-lane, tonight at 7.30 pm. Further performances will be given on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday at the same time each evening. The plays chosen for this programme cover a particularly interesting range of authors, including Eliot, Tchegov, Pirandello, and Lennox Robinson, each of whom is represented by one work.

The Tchegov piece, which will be played by a cast selected from the main acting strength of the Questors, is his famous little sketch, "**The Proposal**". Pirandello is to be represented by one of his Sicilian plays, recently translated by Frederick May and entitled "**The Other Son**"; Mr Eliot's offering is the first part of his renowned play, "Murder in the Cathedral", and Lennox Robinson's contribution is to be his subtly named play, "**Crabbed Youth and Age**." These last three pieces are being played by casts mainly selected from the Second Year Student Group, who will be supplemented, as necessary, from the main acting group.

Major Dramatists

It is unusual to come across a programme of one-act plays so fully composed of the works of major dramatists of this calibre. Too few of our first rank authors, with a few obvious exceptions, ever tackle the one-act form. This may be largely due to the current lack of demand from professional theatre, as is often argued; but it may also be partly because of the extreme difficulties inherent in the form - technical difficulties that would be fully appreciated in all their enormity by the master dramatist, but possibly never realised by the journeymen who write lesser piece, to the detriment of both themselves and the one-act form which they so often mishandle.

Fortunately there need be no doubts about the merits of any of the authors selected for the programme at the Questors tonight. Each is well enough established to know what is required by the most demanding form of dramatic writing. Members who have not yet done so are advised to apply at once for their tickets, as the total number of seats available is limited. There is no entitlement of free seats for this extra production. Box-office hours are now 6.30-7.30 pm on nights of performance only. Apply to the Questors Theatre, Mattock-lane (Ealing 5184) for all information about the club. Address letters to the Theatre Manager (Miss Rena Rice).

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13 February 1954

FOUR PAYS AND A HALF by PAUL BEDFORD

The written prelude and verbal postscript to my first visit to the Ealing Green Players last Friday was the gratuitous information that their production of Patrick Hamilton's play "**Rope**" had been a venture on the part of their younger and less experienced members. I do not know whether this manifestly obvious fact was imparted lest I fail to notice the utter inadequacy of the playing in the hope that I might overlook it, or just to save my using epithets about the whole group that were properly applicable only to the so to speak "B" company. Whatever the intention it seems only fair to pass the point on for consideration.

Inexperience in youth is inevitable and largely to be overlooked or forgiven. We learn by our mistakes. Nevertheless. We can only learn from mistakes provided we are aware of them for what they are. There is no more depressing thing than blissful ignorance; and nothing more difficult to take than advice which differs from a course of action on which we have already determined. What advice, then, might usefully have been given to these youngster before they embarked upon this production.

In the first place to try and look as though they enjoyed being on stage; in the second to learn something of the rich variety that can be found in the human voice, flexibility and pace, and in stage movement; in the third to grab eagerly at all the help and other advice they could get from their more experienced members; and in the fourth place, not to attempt "**Rope**" in the first place. This latter advice would be based on the assumption that they could not depict a Mayfair flat on their stage; and that if they did, they would have no idea how to behave in it, even the elementary business of pouring drinks being beyond them.

The fact is...

This may sound harsh. It may even sound snobbish. But the fact is inescapable; it is useless to try and act the part of a Bedouin if you can't ride a camel. The vitality important in this play depends entirely upon the acting. We must be convinced that there is a corpse in the chest from which the macabre meal is served (and surely this ritual calls for a spotless white cloth, not a visibly-mended coloured one?) And this conviction can be given only by those two characters who share the guilty secret. As it was, I remained coolly content that it was empty until Rupert Cadell (David Harper) opened it; by which time it was nearly three acts too late.

Ronald Newitt, as Brandon, displayed little of that essential inner nervous strain that must be felt by a murderer in pursuit of supernal excitements from his crime. And his partner, Kenneth Shallis. As Granillo, showed too much of the wrong kind of hysteria too often; it should ebb and flow, Walter Bush's rich voice would have become Sir Johnstone Kentley well, but a deplorably bad make-up ruined the performance. Anne Sheldon, as Leila Arden, showed a spark of life now and again; but only Mr Harper gave anything like what is needed, and he did notably well with the "twenty five to eleven" speech.

At the Questors

After this rather unhappy Friday evening it was a joy, as it turned out. To see a

further three and a half plays at the Questors Theatre on Saturday. These were performed mainly by the Questors' Second Year Students.

The half-play was the first part of T S Eliot's "**Murder in the Cathedral**" which opened the programme. Dramatically, of course, this was the wrong half of the play to select; but the choice was obviously dictated by the requirements of casting, and the Canterbury Chorus is good for training purposes. Edward Pitt's Becket was a gallant effort in a difficult part; the priests and tempters were neatly doubled by Vincent McQueen, Keith Molstadt, Michael Green and Roger Fleming; and the Chorus was well drilled and well spoken.

This was followed by Chekhov's spirited jest, "**The Proposal**", in a lively production by John Howard, with a cast hand-picked from the Questors' Acting members: Frank White, Gillian Andrews and John Scott. To be quite honest, remembering the fantastically accomplished production at the Old Vic five years ago, I had strong doubts about the wisdom of choosing this particular piece for amateurs; even the high standards set by the Questors would undergo a severe trial, it seemed. This is the kind of thing that calls for every kind of perfection in the playing; speed, timing, voice manipulation, effective movement, and polished interplay between characters. It got all that it required from this team and the result was superbly funny.

Sensation of the evening

Next came Pirandello's play entitled "**The Other Son**", which has been strongly translated by Frederick May. Oddly enough, although it is a shapeless piece, with no beginning, middle, or end, and all the significant action has taken place several years before, this play gave the greatest sensation of the entire evening. It had, in fact a single overwhelming positive merit; the performance of Maragrazia by Zoe Bailey. This was superbly done, and terrifying; the crazed old woman telling of her ghastly experiences, the horrors through which she had survived. It gripped the audience like a vice; and at least one member was

quite unable to look at the programme to see who was plying the part until it was gloriously finished.

Lastly, back to a gayer note and across to Ireland for Lennox Robinson's "**Crabbed Youth and Age**", a delightful work, showing how the widowed mother of three girls entertains her daughters' young men to the complete exclusion of the younger generation. The young men were well played by Edward Pitt, Keith Molstadt and Roger Fleming; the young girls by Catherine Scrivener, Jose Rowdon and Diana Denning; and the widow, Mrs Swan, by Marion Owen. Miss Owen managed perfectly easily to convince us that she would be far more attractive to young men than would her daughters,

who simply could not understand that youth must give way to experience, particularly when experience is coupled with charm, an attribute seldom found in youth.

All the plays, except "**The Proposal**" were produced by Pamela Richards, who supervises the acting classes of the Second Year Student Group. The scant, but sufficient, settings were designed by George Benn. The whole evening turned out to be the best so far given by any Student Group in this annual one-act play programme.

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