

## TWO GOOD PLAYS OUT OF THREE AT QUESTORS

COLIN FINBOW'S "Night Time for the Birds" (the first of the three one-act plays presented last week by the Questors student group at Mattock-lane, Ealing) is a pocket version of "Look Back in Anger," but without the social frustration, warmth, humour, or compassion.

It devotes itself to a uniquely unpleasant husband's tormenting of his faded wife and retarded son, prior to going off with a brassily shallow girl (a clever, accurate performance by Mary Holland).

### Pet caterpillars

From the moment that the cretinous boy lurches on-stage to tenderly feed his pet caterpillars, we know that before the end his father is bound to pour hot water on them.

Mr. Finbow's curious attempt at giving the brute a final pang of conscience comes, needless to say, far too late to be credible or to redeem the nasty little opus.

After this, James Saunders' "Double Double" appeared even more humanely level-headed than it was. During lunch-hour in a busmen's canteen, drivers and conductors, inspectors and kitchen-staff exchange domestic and romantic anecdotes, hopes and disenchantments, in a realistic flow of colloquial, serio-comic dialogue.

### Range of wit

Mr. Saunders's wit ranges from the seemingly obvious statement which proves to be otherwise ("Watch my sandwiches, will you?" "Why, what are they going to do?"), through malapropism "consummation" instead of "conservation") and double-entendre (a monologue on the pleasures of "sausage and mash"), to unconscious irony ("Don't you

call me a left-winger: I'll complain to my Union about you") and cheerful vulgarity (a discussion on lavatories and the unreliability of the bladder).

None of this may be especially original, little of it downright hilarious; and the author typically lets the talk run on a bit too long. But most of it is decidedly agreeable: the character of the depressed young driver Gimlet (well played by Michael Langridge), and his closing scene with the girl-friend, with whom he somehow can't make contact, introduce a balancing note of equally authentic melancholy; and all in all, this is a much happier achievement than the same writer's portentously inflated, fashionably overrated "Next Time I'll Sing To You."

### Virtuoso chances

Lastly, there was Ingmar Bergman's "A Painting on Wood" (which inspired his "Seventh Seal"). The characteristic, ostensibly medieval, but in fact urgently contemporary parable of religious faith and doubt in a menacing world is less clearly and grippingly conceived here than in the film.

But it still afforded some virtuoso chances to the cast: in particular, Mary Holland (again) as the witch reliving her own burning, and Wylie Longmore bringing a coolly sardonic, balletic dash to the Pirandellian actor's self-analytical soliloquy. And Michael Hoddell's production (as in the companion-pieces) had quiet competence.

DOUGLAS McVAY

## Quick-change studies by Questors' students

JAMES SAUNDERS, author of "Next Time I'll Sing to You," has a wonderful idea in his one-act play, "Double Double," which the Questors' students put on at the weekend. Set in a busmen's canteen, it has ten characters, who are constantly going in and out in such a way that they can be shared by half that number of actors, each playing two parts. Thus not only do we have a highly piquant situation but a rare opportunity

one another but never meet. As one of them says: "You would think he was trying to avoid me." Since the pair are played by the same actor it would, of course, be impossible for them to meet!

There is an inspector who has lost a bus. The driver has inadvertently tried to pass under a low-level bridge and sliced off the top, "so we now have an open-top double decker bus." When the driver eventually arrives it is our old friend the inspector surprisingly rejuvenated.

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### Eric Bourne's weekly entertainment guide

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THE standard of acting showed what can be done with young people when given interesting characters to portray and good dialogue to speak. We were particularly impressed by Michael Langridge who doubled the parts of Nimrod, an old driver who lives on sausages and mash, and the sour young Gimlet, who drives at 40 miles an hour and hates everybody.

is given for quick-change characterisation.

The play has been broadcast, under the title, "Gimlet," with each part played individually. The Questors themselves have given it to schools in this manner, but it must inevitably have lost much of its point.

The dialogue, consisting of arguments over the food, schedules, and women who hail buses with umbrellas from the wrong side of the road, is always racy and often very funny.

There are a coloured driver and his conductor who are constantly chasing

But it seems invidious to single out anyone where all contributed so much to the team. Wylie Longmore played the two coloured men who spend their time dodging one another, John Turner was the grumbling inspector, and Bert Dagg, the driver who collides with the bridge, Winifred Fraser was the cook, for ever threatening to give notice, and Gimlet's reproachful conductress, and Rachel Emmet was the kitchen maid and Bert's poor little shocked team-mate.