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Four Plays for the price of one by Questors student group

Last week in Ealing, the Questors student group presented four short plays by distinguished authors. Tennessee Williams' "The Lady of Larkspur Lotion" and "Portrait of Madonna" are two moderately effective blueprints for Blanche DuBois.

At Mattock-lane the former, little more than a curtain-raiser, was chiefly notable for the atmospheric decor touch of the pink bar-sign glowing through the bedroom window, and Ewart Vaughan-Hopkins' melancholy "Larkspur Lotion Blues" jangling away on the piano offstage.

The latter, though, [ran?] longer and afforded Liat Sandys the chance of an inevitably compelling - if vocally somewhat limited - tour de force in the name-part.

Major Items

But the major items arrived with Lorca's "The Love of Don Perlimplin" and Shaw's "The Shewing-Up of Blanco Posnet": both comedies on tragic subjects. Why did the Lorca prove to be the most and the Shaw the least successful piece of the evening? Because, I think, it's easier to create a work in this vein if you're an essentially sombre dramatist than if you're a fundamentally witty one.

Admittedly, at his very best, GBS managed it in "Man and Superman." But "Blanco Posnet" is far from his best. The dangers inherent in the idea of a satirical "Oxbow incident" become explicit with the jarring introduction amidst the impudent Shavianisms of a wholly poignant figure, a woman whose child has died.

In such circumstances, neither a lively production nor Karla Shackell's assured cameo of a tough Wild West floozie could quite save the day.

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Graver moods

In "Perlimplin," by contrast, the graver moods of "Blood Wedding" and "Bernarda Alba" are always discernible; first the sexual desire, expressed in engagingly Rabelaisian humour; then the tragedy expressed in a kind of pathetic Guignol masquerade. And throughout, there is poetry; lyrical richness of language.

Michael Hoddell and Tony Carruthers (director and set designer for the entire quartet) were here especially sensitive; while unquestionably the night's finest performance came from Bashir Badruddin as the old grandee who peacefully commits suicide on realising he cannot satisfy his passionate young wife.

Mr. Badruddin, squinting, hobbling, clucking and chuckling, or else simply standing alone towards the end nodding his head and crooning to himself "The trees all fall and die with love," was unerringly funny and sad.

Jo Green contributed a sharp sketch of wily match-making; and as for Florence Cooper as the bride, one could really believe in her "blushing like a geranium."

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