

QUESTORS OPEN SEASON WITH POLITICAL PLAY

THE Questors on Saturday opened their 1950-51 season with a new play, by Lydia Ragosin, entitled "The Tinsel of Athens." The run continues until Tuesday next, October 3.

The main story of the play relates the unhappy experiences of a young Russian scientist, who has fled from the Soviet to seek refuge in England. But his plea is "Russia, with all thy faults I love thee still," though the author refrains from enumerating the faults just as she fails to identify exactly what the poor man's secret, that so interests the British Intelligence authorities, may be. It is on the persistent pursuit of this nebulous "secret" (there is vague mention of atomic missiles), ultimately leading to the Russian's most honourable suicide, in circumstances that no intelligent person would have permitted to obtain, that the play is based.

There are subsidiary tales of love interests between an unaccountably arthritic woman writer and a very inconsistent character of a Lieutenant-Colonel; between an equally inconsistent young solicitor and an extremely odd White Russian girl; and between the same odd girl and the scientist, who finishes up by marrying her and trying to teach her Russian.

It is never made quite clear what the author is driving at, though it is painfully obvious that she is driving at something. The most potent thought, beyond any related to tedium, that came to my head was that all countries have both vices and virtues; and that the difference between Communism as an entity of political faith and as inevitably practised in any community is only one of degree. This is safest interpreted as a plea

for international understanding.

The Russian scientist was played with amazing effect by Raymond Angel, whose performance was almost the greatest delight of the evening. If he failed to make his position quite clear it was only because the author had not given him the necessary lines to speak. But he certainly did more than could reasonably have been expected with the part. Reginald Hamlyn did well as the Lieut.-Colonel, but found it impossible to portray a consistent character as there was none there to be portrayed. Patrick Brain found the same difficulty as the solicitor. He became very heated politically, but gave up his fiancée without a murmur. This fiancée was played by Alexandra Turner, and others in the cast were Eve Aikman and Edward Scrivener.

But there was one other character. The Colonel's housekeeper, Miss Paternoster. This was the best-drawn character in the play; and it was beautifully handled by Ruby Feast. It was not an easy part because she took the Russian's side, being controlled by sentiment more than assumed political up-bringing. Her main interest was to see the young couple happy; and this came far above nationalities and politics. She was, in fact, the sanest of the bunch, looking at human beings as elements of humanity rather than instruments of strife under the infernal banners of ideologies. For this creation I commend the author; and the name given to the character could hardly have been more apt.

The play was produced by Alfred Emmet.

PAUL BEDFORD

QUESTORS THEATRE, EALING

"THE TINSEL OF ATHENS"

BY LYDIA RAGOSIN

"My country right or wrong" seems to be the theme of this confused play. Having valiantly elected to deal in ideas, the author is continually finding how easy it is to be emotional instead. A Russian scientist seeks refuge with the British. If he has indeed been working on weapons, we should like him to tell us about them. For his part he loves Russia—not Soviet Russia or the memory of Tsarist Russia or Russia under any particular social system, but Russia irrational and entire, as a humanitarian loves humanity. If he cannot bring himself to give away its secrets, this is not out of respect for the Soviet but because the secrets are the property of Russian men and women. Miss Ragosin's people talk constantly, with small regard for their supposed or probable character. Mr. Raymond Angel finds at least a surface of amiable obstinacy for the young man, but it is a part which does not lend itself to performance in the amateur theatre.

THE QUESTORS

"THE TINSEL OF ATHENS"

On September 23, at their theatre at Mattocks-lane, Ealing, the Questors presented a new play by Lydia Ragosin, entitled

"The Tinsel of Athens."

Miss Ragosin attempts to analyse the true feelings of a modern young Russian, Sergei, who has escaped from Russia through fear of the secret police, yet, probably assisted by copious readings of Pushkin's verse, has an overpowering love for his country. As he is the possessor of the secret of Russia's new atomic weapons, the British Intelligence try by passive means to force him to divulge his secret to them, but his mind is so confused politically and patriotically that he cannot bear to think of these weapons being used against his own people, and despite the love of a young and beautiful wife, he solves his problems by falling from a balcony.

Though many of the speeches are too long, the interest does not flag

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and most of the characters are well drawn. The acting is of the Questors' usual high standard. Raymond Angel gives a convincing performance as the harassed Sergei. Reginald Hamlyn, as Colonel Sykes, acts with a brusque yet kindly manner, in keeping with his part as officer and gentleman who is forced to do unpleasant duties for England. Eve Aikman, as the successful novelist in love with the Colonel, flashes from patience to anger in a most convincing manner, and Alexandra Turner, as Sergei's English-born Russian wife, is tender, loving yet cheerful under all the vicissitudes that befall her in her brief period of matrimony. Patrick Brain manages the difficult and unsympathetic part of Edwin Sykes with apparent ease, and Ruby Feast, as a housekeeper, and Edward Scrivener, as a reporter, give convincing performances. Alfred Emmet, who produced, skilfully steered the play through its difficult patches and kept the interest alive.