

Questors
Romeike & Curtice Ltd.

EXTRACT FROM
MIDDLESEX COUNTY TIMES

17 NOV 1951

Shakespeare and the skylon

Last Saturday the second production of the current Questors' season opened at their theatre in Mattock-lane: The play was Shakespeare's early romantic comedy, "The Two Gentlemen of Verona," and the run finishes on Tuesday next, November 20.

Every experiment proves something. Here we have an experimental production, with an experimental permanent setting, of a play that, by virtue of its being so seldom seen, it is something of an experiment to perform at all. Thus is the evening charged with interest for the theatre-lover.

The play itself is interesting for the rough drafts of characters that are later to become immortal. In Julia and Silvia we can see sketches of Portia and Nerissa, of Rosalind and Celia. In Launce and Speed we find outlines of the two Gobbos. In Proteus we may detect an Iago in embryo, and in Thurio a potential Roderigo. Hazlitt described the piece as "little more than the first outlines of a comedy loosely sketched in." Little wonder, then, that it suffers in performance from the uncertain glory of an April day. It tells a charming story; but with insufficient charm to hold us completely. It is fun; but with too little humour to keep modern audiences constantly amused. And we find ourselves wishing Julia were Viola, and the setting Illyria.

However, travellers must be content. If we set out for Verona we cannot expect to find Illyria, though we may express surprise at finding Peter Curtis's production, in

Norman Branson's setting, drops us into a corner of the late South Bank Exhibition, within a furlong of the Skylon. As a spectacle this is delightful; but as a stage set it is questionable, for it has no dramatic significance, it limits movement, and it retards the flow of the production, making the main lines of each scene completely parallel because, unlike the South Bank, it has only two entrances, which are in constant use. Moreover, the costumes, although adhering strictly to no period, strike an odd contrast with the architectural lines, and the blatantly modern trumpet that heralds the Duke seems quaintly out of tune (visually, I hasten to add) with everything else.

The acting, which I seem to have left little space to discuss, is mainly sound. John Howard's Proteus is well spoken and apt; Reginald Hamlyn's Valentine, efficient; Theresa Heffernan's Julia, charming as a woman, delightful as a boy; Joan Bate's Silvia, sweet; Anthony Holloway's Thurio, as wet, irritating, and refreshing as a monsoon; and Henry Heilpern makes the Duke nicely pungent.

But the comedians pleased us most. Edmund Scrivener's Speed is acutely right, his delivery of the speech explaining how he knows his master is in love being brilliantly done. David Lorraine gives us an emphatically amusing Launce, and Crab, his dog, deserves a special mention, even though he is sadly miscast, being, I feel sure, far too nicely behaved an animal to do the thing Launce tells us about so amusingly.

PAUL BEDFORD

EXTRACT FROM Stage

15 NOV 1955

THE QUESTORS

"THE TWO GENTLEMEN OF VERONA"

On November 10 at their theatre in Mattock-lane, Ealing, the Questors presented Shakespeare's "The Two Gentlemen of Verona."

To provide an ideal setting for this jewel of Shakespeare's thought the producer has availed himself of the best of scenic art and lighting and adapted medieval costume to new and original designs which, while retaining their old beauty, gain a fresh and novel charm. The addition of an apron to the stage gives greater freedom of movement. These experiments are fully justified by the admirable result, which enhances the unsophisticated appeal of the play itself.

The inconstancy of Proteus leaves John Howard with a dilemma. He portrays him not as a likeable rake but as a man obviously sincere in his passion for both Sylvia and Julia, yet discomfited by his lack of integrity in this respect. Reginald Hamlyn is a sincere and noble Valentine, and Speed and Launce, played by Edmund Scrivener and David Lorraine respectively, bring out the full humour of these delightful clowns. Theresa Heffernan's

portrayal of Julia is marked by a dignified performance of true love surmounting all difficulties, and Joan Bate is a determined and vital Sylvia. The other members of a large cast give admirable support. Peter Curtis is the producer.

17 NOV 1951

The Times 17/11/51

QUESTORS THEATRE, EALING

"THE TWO GENTLEMEN OF VERONA"

BY WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

Amateur actors who put on interesting plays seldom to be seen on the professional stage, and do them well enough to make us think about them, have surely earned the title to a theatre of their own, a figure which the Questors company is now urgently trying to turn into a fact.

In the case of *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, some inequalities in the performance make us review our opinion of Proteus. Because the Proteus (Mr. John Howard) is on the whole a more dashing and persuasive actor than the Valentine (Mr. Reginald Hamlyn), the character appears in an unfamiliar light. We see him not as a false friend and rascal without whose machinations there would be no plot, but rather as the spirit of the play personified. For in a play that is all about love, sooner or later one finds oneself asking: which of the characters is most in love? For poetical purposes, for the purposes of the play, Valentine is in love, Silvia is in love, Julia is in love. But for practical purposes, and by Proustean standards, Proteus with all his despair and all his unscrupulousness is the only one of them in whose passion we believe.

The gentlemen in the company are this time generally better than the ladies, and the production can also offer us a lively Speed (Mr. Edmund Scrivener) and a still livelier Launce (Mr. David Lorraine), whose comedy together, rather in the manner of a music-hall turn, is a distinct asset.

Questors **Romeike & Curtice Ltd.**

EXTRACT FROM
MIDDLESEX COUNTY TIMES

3 - NOV 1951

Questors to give Shakespeare comedy

Next Saturday, at 7.30 p.m., the second production of the current Questors' season opens at their theatre in Mattock-lane. The play is Shakespeare's "The Two Gentlemen of Verona" and the run continues until Tuesday week, November 20.

This play, written in 1593, between "The Comedy of Errors" and "Love's Labour's Lost," and published in the first folio thirty years later, is one of Shakespeare's earliest comedies. It tells a charming story in language that often forewarns us of the greater poetry to come from the same pen at a later date, in passages, as Hazlitt put it, "of high poetical spirit, and of inimitable quaintness of humour."

It is one of the lesser performed plays of Shakespeare, and Questors audiences should not miss the opportunity to see it on the stage.

The box office is now open, and members are advised to make early application for their free seats to avoid any chance of disappointment. Non-members wishing to join the Club are reminded that the subscription (fifteen shillings, due to be raised to £1 on December 1) covers a free seat for each production and is effective for one year from any month.

Application should be made to the theatre manager (Miss Rena Rice). The Questors Theatre, Mattock-lane, Ealing, W.5 (Perivale 5184), from whom all particulars can be obtained.