

MCT 28 February
1953

"Thieves' Carnival" at the Questors'

FOURTH PRODUCTION IN CURRENT SEASON

Next Saturday will be the first night of the fourth production in the current Questors' season. The play to be performed is "Le Bal des Voleurs," by Jean Anouilh, which has been translated by Lucienne Hill and given the English title "Thieves' Carnival." There will be the usual run of nine performances, ending on Tuesday, March 17.

"Le Bal des Voleurs" was written by Anouilh in 1932. But it was not produced until 1938, when the premiere was given in Paris. It was first seen in this country when Miss Hill's version was presented by the famous Birmingham Repertory Theatre in 1951. The same year it was performed in the original French at the Edinburgh Festival, since when it has been seen in London, where Miss Hill's version was used for the short run given by the Arts Theatre Club when they produced it about a year ago.

A Gay Frivol

ago.

A Gay Frivol

If the majority of Anouilh's plays fall into the category of "rose" or "noir" there is no doubt into which class this piece falls. It is surely the most "rose" of them all, being even lighter and gayer, and moreover (if one can credit such a thing) less serious than any of his other plays, not excluding "L'Invitation au Chateau," which we know over here as "Ring Around the Moon." Indeed, when it was seen at the Arts Mr. J. C. Trewin described it very neatly as a "ring round a crescent moon." It is just simply a gay frivol which can safely be recommended to anyone wishing a few hours' merry fluttering with the butterflies.

The box office is now open at the Questors Theatre (between the hours of 7 and 9 p.m. or 6.30 to 7.30 on days of performance) and members are advised to make early application for their free seats, if disappointment is to be avoided. Non-members who are interested in the theatre are invited to apply to the Theatre Manager, the Questors Theatre, Mattock-lane, W.5. (Ealing 5184), from whom all particulars of membership may be obtained.

To save any others from unnecessary telephoning we must remind readers that the Questors is a club theatre; which means that only members are entitled to purchase tickets for productions. Club membership, at a subscription of £1 per annum, includes a free seat for each of the productions during the year (usually seven in number). Associate members pay 5s per year, which entitles them to buy seats for the productions at the current prices—at present 5s, 4s and 2s 6d.

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The Stage 12
March 1953

French frolic opens at the Questors'

To-night, at their theatre in Mattock-lane, the Questors will be giving the first performance of their fourth production in the current season. It is to be the delightful comedy by Jean Anouilh, which is known to us as "Thieves' Carnival." The run will continue until Tuesday week, March 17.

This French frolic, which was first produced in Paris just before the last world war, will be the first of three plays of French origin to form the middle part of the Questors' season; their next two productions being Jean-Paul Sartre's "Les Mains Sales," known to us as "Crime Passionel," and Moliere's "Tartuffe," in the translation recently made by Miles Malleson.

The box office is open on nights of performance between the hours of 6.30 and 7.30 p.m., and members are reminded that applications for seats can be dealt with at no other times. Non-members who are interested in the theatre, in the capacity of actor, actress, stage carpenter, set designer, producer, or simply as a member of an appreciative audience, are invited to apply for particulars of membership, details of which may be had on request from the Theatre Manager (Miss Rena Rice), the Questors Theatre, Mattock-lane, Ealing, W.5. (Telephone: Ealing 5184).

THE QUESTORS

"THIEVES' CARNIVAL"

On March 7, at their theatre in Mattock-lane, Ealing, the Questors presented the play by Jean Anouilh.

This, of all Anouilh's plays, is essentially a producer's piece. It is a study in fantasy, as light as thistle-down, and having the freshness and gaiety of a harlequinade, which in many ways it resembles, although the enigmatic figure of the musician who pipes so merrily in the gardens adds an air of mystery.

Barbara Hutchins is a whimsical Lady Hurl with a method underlying her apparent eccentricities, and Frank White, as her husband, combines a determination with his absent-mindedness. The part of the leader of the thieves fits Edmund Scrivener like a glove, particularly when he assumes the identity of the Spanish Grandee. David Lorraine and Anthony Holloway are the unfortunate Dupont-Duforts, senior and junior respectively, and Carroll Dodgson and Joan Bate are the essentially feminine and wayward nieces.

Abraham Asseo devised a colourful production, with décor by Honor O'Nians.

THEATRICAL CARDS

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DELECTABLE TRIFLE AT THE QUESTORS'

LAST Saturday the Questors presented the first performance of the fourth production in their current season. The run continues until next Tuesday. The play is "Le Bal des Voleurs," by Jean Anouilh, which has been translated into English by Lucienne Hill under the title "Thieves' Carnival." The Questors were honoured by Miss Hill's presence at their first night performance.

The scene, according to the programme, is Vichy before the war. The play opens in a park, reminiscent of Beatrice Mayor's pleasure garden, where Lord Edgard sits quietly reading "The Times." That it happened to be last Saturday's edition (the pictures on the back page are easily identified) may be dismissed as one of a hundred inconsequential incongruities that are the ingredients of this delectable trifle. It is a comedy of no manners, more akin to effervescent champagne than to vapid Vichy water.

Among the passers-by move three thieves, picking pockets and plucking pearls from unwary strollers. Their several disguises are so good, however, that they find themselves robbing each other. Lady Hurf, wealthy and weary, joins Lord Edgard. The thieves, dressed now as fine Spanish grandees, approach the affluent pair. They are surprised to be greeted as old friends and offered hospitality by the capricious Lady Hurf, whose whim it is to be entertained by their prank. The pastimes of the rich are unpredictable; but if one can afford to be robbed—well, it adds a little colour to life.

But it is impossible to unravel the gossamer strands that hold the piece together as it tenuously threads its way round fairyland. The gay galaxy of caprices gyrate far from Vichy, into the land of Queen Mab. Indeed, this is the kind of play that Mercutio might have written, had he been a playwright. It is "begot of nothing but vain fantasy, which is as thin of substance as the air," and it would surely have made a most apt addition to Prospero's revels; for it needs that magical lightness of touch, in production, and an audience ingenuous as Miranda and Prince Ferdinand, who spoke of "a most majestic vision and harmonious charmingly."

From miming start

Abraham Asseo has just the touch required. His production floats gaily along from miming start to prancing finish, accompanied through-

out by gentle strains of sweet music, specially composed by Haya J. Asseo and played by Alistair Ridley and Don Vergara (off-stage), and Vivian Allen (on-stage), who might almost be described as Mr. Asseo's Ariel. So nicely handled is the production that the audience quickly find they are caught up in the delicate enchantment, willing participants in the exuberant carnival.

The gaiety flows freely in all directions; from the exquisite sets, designed by Honor O'Nians, three in number and each expansively evocative of the candy-floss world of rich imagination, throughout the entire cast, and down to the smallest articles on the gilded tables in Lady Hurf's voluptuous villa.

The individual achievements of the cast must be measured against this indescribable background of fantasy. Frank White or Barbara Hutchins, as Lord Edgard and Lady Hurf, have only to walk across the scene to make an audience laugh delightedly. Edmund Scrivener, John Vernon and Robert Jones, the three thieves, make a very fine comic trio with Mr. Scrivener as the master-mind overriding his two romantically inclined assistants; Mr. Vernon chasing one of Lady Hurf's nieces, Eva, trying to discover which of his sundry faces she will like (i.e. changing his moustache every few minutes!), and Mr. Jones running along the path of true romantic love with the other niece, Juliette.

Carroll Dodgson gives us an Eva of distinction, whom we may well imagine to be the centre of male attraction at any kind of ball; and Joan Bate excels as Juliette, the untarnished bloom of youth and innocence, the only truly happy person in Vichy—if not in the whole world. David Lorraine and Anthony Holloway clown effectively as Dupont-Dufort senior and junior, a couple of no-good fortune-hunters who would bore the life out of boredom itself. We also remember the composure of Theresa Hefferman's nursemaid, and the very sweet presence of Caroline Smith, the little girl who dances and gathers blossoms at the bottom of the garden.

But, after all, that is where the whole play takes place; and for those who like to stroll in that place where the fairies live, it would be difficult to find more agreeable company than that of which it is our privilege to write.

PAUL BEDFORD.