

Some thoughts on **GILGAMESH**

I think there is no doubt that **Gilgamesh** was the most adventurous production at The Questors for many a day. Moreover it has taken us a considerable step forward in our progress towards the new theatrical forms which we must develop and exploit in our new theatre.

In the first place, not only was it a play specifically written for our theatre, but one specifically written for non-proscenium presentation — for some form of open stage. That in itself would be enough to make it something of an occasion. In the actual writing Michael Kelly was able to experiment with some of the possibilities opened to the writer by such a method of presentation — freedom from time and place, a swift flow, interesting and intricate patterns of dialogue, great directness, a concentration of thought and emotion, and a strong theatricality.

The staging of the play was also something new. In our new theatre we are to have an arrangement known as a “space stage”, an idea which grew out of the plans after the theatre had been designed. For this production Norman Branson (who is, of course, also the architect of the new theatre) designed a set which came as near to this conception as is possible in our present building. It was a deliberate attempt to explore the possibilities of this space stage of the future, one of which is the use of moving scenery, an idea deriving from Gordon Crag, who once designed a set of moving screens to be suitable for many different plays.

The only scenery in **Gilgamesh**



Betty White and Wilfred Sharp
in a scene from “**Gilgamesh**”.

was three large triangles or prisms (similar in shape to the **periaktoi** of the ancient Greek stage). By putting an actor inside each, these could be moved about in infinitely various relationships in space, heightened and intensified by the play of directional and coloured lighting on the surfaces of the triangles. The imaginative effect was often intense and great beauty was achieved.

The significant thing was that, while drawing together many threads from the past, the result was something quite new in stagecraft; satisfying for the particular show and hinting at possibilities for further development in the future. Of at least equal significance is the fact that **the audience enjoyed the show**.

Michael Kelly, Colette King, the director, and Norman Branson have built a landmark in The Questors' history at least as important and far-reaching as when Eric Voce first brought a naturalistic play (**The Doll's House**) out on to the fore-stage.

A.E.