

County Times
24 September
1960

payable.

LESSON FOR AUNT EDNA

OF the three short avant-garde plays about the intellectual's predicament in society which the Questors are presenting until Sunday under the collective title "Not for Aunt Edna," Eugene Ionesco's "The Lesson" remains, despite fundamental defects in production, several times as stimulating as the other two put together.

M. Ionesco's classroom curtain-raiser brings back to the world of mid-twentieth century art that uniquely disturbing blend of Grand Guignol and Freudian fetish one had thought lost to the early 'thirties and the films of Dali and Bunuel.

Suddenly, amid all the merry irreverence of the author's logically illogical attacks upon pedantry, the senile savant counsels his pretty girl pupil to remember her curriculum "till the day she dies": slowly, again, they thrash and mouth themselves into a useless yet unavoidable frenzy, he by his incessant iteration of the origins of the neo-Spanish languages, she — finger stuck avidly between lips — by her equally relentless reiteration of the simple physical fact that her tooth hurts.

Not quite . . .

Given performance of sufficiently rapt intensity, this climactic lecture on philology can provoke sheer nervous excitement of a kind seldom experienced in the theatre.

At Mattock - lane, actor Philip Wright and director Michael Almaz don't quite achieve the mounting speed and obsessive menace necessary (a little surprisingly, in view of Mr. Almaz's breakneck brilliance on last December's "Birthday Party").

Still, they manage well enough, while Jan Kenny makes an ideally hesitant, virginal nymphet.

A different pain

And the piece's terrible, hilarious eroticism, which has been apparent beneath its lampooning and laughter throughout, now shines finally, flagrantly forth as the old man at last discovers the sole way he may communicate with his pain-preoccupied charge, via more pain but a different pain — an ache of the senses that causes her to forget the mere aching of her teeth, an anguished abandonment to pleasure which culminates in the orgasmic repetition of the word "knife" and his phallic stabbing of her with a dagger. "A-aa-h!", breathes the master in a long-drawn sigh of satiety. "Now I feel better."

His Puritan maid, who started by warning him to "stay off arithmetic," mutters in renewed disapproval. "You'll get heart-trouble" . . .

In this jeu d'esprit Ionesco expresses a universal truth, however Mr. Rattigan's eponymous Auntie may be shocked by it.

Pure drama scores

Yet it is in pure drama rather than didacticism that "The Lesson" scores particularly over its companions in the Questor bill.

It begins and ends with the tutor welcoming a fresh victim. Similarly, Arthur Adamov's "Professor Taranne" opens and closes on the idea of Taranne exposing himself in public. But when the curtain falls upon M. Ionesco's play we have learnt just why the tutor behaves thus, by means of a classically constructed, illuminatingly dialogued symbolic plot.

Such is far from the case with the Adamov: though Paul Imbusch's portrait carries quiet pathos, we're left uncertain whether the character suffers from (a) Kafkaesque persecution, (b) dementia praecox, or (c) inner personal disillusionment.

As for Michel de Ghelderode's turgid would-be satire "Christopher Columbus," written in 1927 and only now granted its British premiere, neither bright Almaz touches nor gay Tadeusz Orłowicz sets and costumes stopped me thinking I could cheerfully have waited a few years more.

DOUGLAS McVAY

The Stage
22 October
1960

GHELDERODE PREMIERE AT THE QUESTORS

"NOT for Aunt Edna" is an apt and witty covering title for the triple bill which opened for ten performances at the Questors, Ealing, last Saturday, and it reflects something of the humorous but deep comprehension with which the director, Michael Almaz, treated Ionesco's "The Lesson," Adamov's "Professor Taranne" and the English première of Michel de Ghelderode's "Christopher Columbus," translated by George Hauger.

Although "Christopher Columbus," translated by George Hauger, and idiom fit aptly into a pro-

formances. Special mention is deserved, however, by Phillip Wright and Jan Kenny as the Teacher and the Pupil in "The Lesson;" Paul Imbusch as a deeply moving Professor Taranne; and Michael Kennedy as Christopher Columbus, with Barrie Philpot as the King, Jan Kenny as the Queen and Laurence Nixon as Montezuma. L.G.S.

' CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS '

Play by Michel de Ghelderode, translated by George Hauger. Presented at the Questors, Ealing, on September 17. Settings and costumes by Tadeusz Orłowicz, choreography by Ludmila Mlada. Directed by Michael Almaz.

gramme with the other two works, with its highly dramatic use of anachronism which by sheer brilliance of usage compels the beholder to accept it on its own terms, as do the idioms of the other two writers.

UNDERSTANDING

Michael Almaz, the Israeli-born director, has considerable experience in this type of play, having had his own little theatre in Tel Aviv devoted to such productions. At the Questors he shows how clear is his understanding both of the dramatic trends involved and of the aspects of life they attempt to portray. He has treated "Columbus" almost in the form of a traditional pantomime, but with an emphasis on the logic arising out of the premise that the hero is living simultaneously in the time of his discovery and the results of it.

No less impressive is the originality of his approach to the other two plays; but it is the originality arising from a considered conception, from having something definite to give to the presentation and not from the desire to achieve difference for its own sake.

The choreography of Ludmila Mlada in "Columbus," and the skill with which she has trained the cast in its execution, makes a stimulating and decorative addition to the production, as does the brilliantly economical décor by Tadeusz Orłowicz.

There are some remarkable per-