

North-West Essex Theatre Guild - Full-length Drama Festival 1989-90.

"Comedy Tonite" - Little Waltham Drama Group.

The Show, - "produced, directed and generally thrown together at the last minute" to quote the heavily facetious programme - was a disarming blend of material from various sources such as ALAN MELVILLE, "Beyond the Fringe" etc; songs from equally familiar shows and dashes of homegrown inspiration. Some of the ever-so-slightly off-beat humour had worn with constant exposure and middle-age yet much of it was as welcome as renewing acquaintance with old friends and the audience reacted accordingly

The Presentation was set against a plain yellow backdrop with the stereotype twin drama masks for once both grinning sardonically - a nice touch and reinforcement for the overall title of the show. The black-and yellow theme was picked up and echoed in the clever variations of costume with the odd bits of accessories - ties, belts, bows and braces etc all helping to identify artistes in their various guises. The programme provided, whilst very amusing, did little to assist any outsider in the process of relating appearance to personality. Admittedly you were playing to a largely familiar audience which was itself familiar with the people onstage but other groups in the Guild manage to link players with items by name and I suggest you might consider this in future.

The opening was delayed because of the unfortunate hold-up of the all-important pianist. I am glad that you had the courtesy to inform the perspiring audience on this baking-hot night of the reason for the delay and apologize for it. The disembodied head that grinned through the centre curtain opening at the lady concerned during her announcement was unacceptable and ^rcertainly not as funny as the guilty party seemed to find himself!

Once the pianist did arrive however, things got under way very expeditiously indeed and the curtain number really set the evening off on its comical, tongue-in-cheek course with good belting attack.

The PETER COOK style mini-monologue from the beret-topped, grubby rain-coated actor was very funny indeed, with subtle use of pause and knowledge of its impact and this set the tone of the programme immediately - though not all of the subsequent items were of this quality in performance.

... that led into the supermarket skit made an effective

framework for the associated following items. Both the assistant - what a revolting girl! - and the customer were very much in tune with the piece and the whole feel and flavour of this particular send-up was not so very far from the truth.

The blonde assistant's bubblegum in the shoeshop was equally disgusting and amusing and the customer returning the parrot was nicely terse and constipated against the driving attack of the assistant. The cosmetic sequence in the big London store was amusingly built-up to its final fed-up flourish with MADELEINE's nasal tones really setting the teeth on edge! The open-pores excursion however never really lifted off and neither did the next affair with the pub selling garments instead of the more usual fare. Hardly to be expected in the latter case when N.F.Simpson in "A Resounding Tinkl" had done it so much more subtly and effectively along the same lines in the Uncle Ted incursion.

"You're never really dressed without a smile" with its big, belting raucous attack dance routine and all those legs came just at the right time to restore impetus to a passage that was beginning to run out of steam, not so much through any deficiencies on the part of the players but through material which has had its day.

The over-exposed one-legged Tarzan sketch was nevertheless nicely done and the following "hard-man heavy" with the snap-brim hat made instant capital of the unexpected crash from backstage. "Fingers Golightly" in the counsel interview scene was very funny with an instinct for natural stage timing.

"Every inch a lady" looked good and sounded better with telling contributions from all the assembled examples of naughty feminine pulchritude on show but especially from the first and last actresses concerned.

The stick-up I found amateurish in the wrong way but there was a real feast of colour and period style in the lavish mounting of "Virtue in Labour" with its transposing of "F" and "S". The vacant bed auction and disease bidding was sharply pertinent in these days of hospital outs - perhaps even more relevant than when it was written and the first half finale was a good rousing conclusion to that part of a varied programme.

"I was born with a smile on my face" opened the second half in fine vivacious manner and "Intermediate French for Beginners" was very well touched in, by CLOTHILDE in particular. The Great Train Robbery interview has dated badly and despite all the

hard-working efforts of the players just didn't work whereas the ANGELA RIPPON skit did - very well indeed! So too did the clown session with the final "Smile" song working its usual tug at the heart-strings very movingly.

The carefully stepped "Class" trio carried off the opportunities well enough with the working-class actor fairly obviously having the best of the battle. The bloke in the tight trousers with the pick-up chat in the bar quite funny and the bar tender sw: switch of character nicely done.

The "Cooking puns" again was distinctly frayed at the edges in terms of wincing familiarity but the next item with the childhood sweetheart encounter woman rattling on non-stop in very funny excruciating verse , for me anyway, was one of the highlights of the evening. I thought she was absolutely first-rate. The girl trio in "Vitality" had just that and the stiff-upper-lipped Squiffy and Jean, the sudden bereaved wife in "The Few" had the vocal style and wartime send-up mannerisms just right and made me laugh a lot.

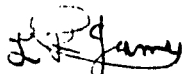
"Things would never have worked" was put across with a sense of mordant mischief and splendidly pointed phrasing by the actress concerned in another outstanding number that I loved enormously.

The four drinkers trying to outdo each other with more and more extreme topping were a pleasing combination and the solo underwear item was nicely displayed by the artiste in question. "The Party of a Lifetime" rounded off the programme in well-arranged and executed style.

The lighting was on cue, the duo accompaniment sympathetic and skilful and the bubbling cheerful flavour of the show communicated itself whole-heartedly to its audience,.

I enjoyed it too.

Best Wishes,



L.R. James Adjudicator.