DINNER WITH THE FAMILY 1965

DRAMA NOTES — by John Martin

An entertaining evening—but not Anouilh

THE brittle and fragile comedy as well as the essential French quality of the plays of Jean Anouilh, make them one of the most difficult for amateurs to achieve. It is not surprising therefore that Teddington Theatre Club failed to put over this French quality in their recent production of 'Dinner with the Family' at York House. It was an entertaining evening but it was not Anouilh.

Bernard Turner had paid careful attention to detail and obtained a smooth-running performance from his players. He was not so successful in pointing the story-line sufficiently or in obtaining the necessary contrast and building up of climax that ensures that the attention of the audience is held. There did not appear to be a strong hand controlling the various styles of the actors. Nevertheless there was an efficiency about the evening that made one wish to see more of this producer's work.

Dick Hills played the part of Georges Delachaume, the young man who hires actors to play his parents when he invites his latest lady friend to dine with him. Meanwhile he leaves his rich wife and his real parents at home in Paris.

As his friend's wife Barbara was also his mistress, Georges must be quite a character. Dick Hills made of him a sincere and honest young man but one did feel that there was much more to him. Was he not a bit of a roué?

Probably the player nearest the style required for Anouilh comedy and perhaps because of this he apepared to be out of key with the rest of this production, was David Evans, who had the part of Georges' friend, Jacques. His pointing of lines and the insidious note he inserted into this rather unpleasant character was well done.

Eileen Johnston and Anthony Eva appeared as the two actors hired to play Georges' parents at the dinner party, and their antics aroused the biggest laughter of the evening. Of the two, Eileen Johnston was the more successful and as usual with this actress, her timing was impeccable. On the other hand, Anthony Eva who one remembers has created many successful rôles for the club, could not seem to hit the right note. His was an essentially artificial character but the artificiality which he conveyed appeared contrived.

On the other hand, Jim Crowther, in the small part of the hired butler, hit the right note and although there was a little tendency to overplay, his performance was completely in accord with the style of the play.

Another promising first performance was given by Sally Coulston as the young lady, Isabelle, whom Georges is so anxious to impress. She looked, and was, charming.

Pat Adelman, another newcomer, played the 'other woman', Barbara, and was very natural. Both these actresses need to enlarge their performances in voice, movement and gesture before their characters will be completely projected to an audience in York House.

The cast was completed by Kathleen Blayney, Stephen Malton, Ann Hazell, Chloe R. Crabbe and Jack Sinclair—not forgetting Simon (Miss Blayney's cat).

A small point, though important, was that certain actors did not appear to have had their make-up checked, giving some peculiar effects from the audience.

Teddington club stage Anouilh play

TEDDINGTON Theatre Club opened their thirty-ninth season last week with a production of Anouilh's "Dinner with the Family." It was to have been Bernard Turner's first production for the club.

Unfortunately a family bereavement kept him away from the first performance at York House, Twickenham which no doubt, largely contributed to the rather unsatisfactory results. There were four performances.

The performance on the Thursday lacked drive and projection, and the plot was insufficiently pointed. Little of what should have been the amusing story of how Georges Delachaume engaged two unemployed actors to pose as his parents in order to impress his girl friend Isabelle, reached the audience, and many of the witty lines were lost as a consequence.

As Georges, a young man burning the candle at both ends, Dick Hills played with ease and assurance without putting over very much of the part's real character. Many of his quieter lines got lost through want of a firmer projection and attack.

David Evans, as his friend Jacques, whose wife Barbara is also his mistress, was much more successful in getting the character across.

Neither Pat Adelman as Barbara nor Sally Coulston as Isabelle showed the sophistication of young women leading such lives as they did in the play.

Anthony Eva and Eileen Johnston, as the hired parents, whose services were not in the end required, excelled in bringing out the couple's indigence and bohemian personalities.

Jim Crowther convinced as the not-too-honest butler. Kathleen Blayney was effective as owner of the mansion hired for the occasion. Stephen Malton and Chloe R. Crabbe were persuasive as Georges's real parents. Anne Hazell was an English, rather than a French, maid. And Jack Sinclair was no sooner on than off as the doctor. "Simon" was not the least distinguished member of the cast.

It was Dick Hills's first major part. Barbara Turner's settings, made by club members, were delightful.

MAURICE REEVE.

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PROBLEM OF FRENCH TEMPERAMENT

ENGLISH actors always find it difficult to reproduce the French temperament. In saying that I refer to professionals. Amateurs must inevitably find it even more of a problem.

Only two weeks ago I wrote of the Nondescripts' failure to reproduce the atmosphere of Jean Anouilh's "Thieves' Carnival." **Teddington Theatre Club** did much better with the same author's **"Dinner with the Family"** at York House, but the only actor who had the real French flavour was Tony Eva. His Delmonte, engaged by a young man to impersonate his father, had both the vanity of the actor and the grand manner that those of Latin race adopt so well.

Eileen Johnston, as the young man's pseudo mother, also had something of the Frenchwoman's excitability.

In the circumstances Bernard Turner had an unenviable task with his first full-length production for the club. He clearly understood the play, but the production needed more variety of pace and more pointing although no doubt the thinness of the audience on the opening night, when I saw the play, had something to do with its lack of impact.

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ONE other actor, besides Tony Eva and Eileen Johnston, was outstanding. He was David Evans who played Jacques, the friend—or rather enemy—of Georges, the young man who conceives the idea of hiring a house, parents and butler for a dinner party to impress his new girl friend, Isabelle. As always he showed a firm grip of his part and even if he did not make the character particularly French, he carried the audience with him all the way.

Dick Hills, playing his first major part for the club, lacked the necessary personality for Georges. He should have been a young man of impudence and cheek with an impressionable manner towards girls. He never conveyed any of these qualities.

Neither was Sally Coulston, another newcomer, too well cast as Isabelle. She is an attractive girl, but somehow did not seem to fit in with the character.

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Dick Hills, Eileen Johnston and Tony Eva in "Dinner With the Family".

STEPHEN MALTON gave another of his old age characterisations as Delachaume, the real father of Georges. For a youngster he is very good, but his movements are too jerky. Like so many young amateurs he seems to think that people become doddery after a certain age.

Chloe Crabbe was her usual self as Madame Delachaume and Pat Adelman gave a reasonable interpretation of Barbara who, married to Jacques, is in love with Georges. Kathleen Blayney, as the owner of the house, brought on her Siamese cat, Simon. Ann Hazell was a pert little maid with a mind of her own, and Jack Sinclair had what must surely be the smallest part he has ever had, that of the doctor who is on stage for about one minute. Jim Crowther was the butler.

The drawing room set, which Barbara Turner had devised, was eminently satisfactory, but it was a pity that the linen room, which forms the setting for the first scene of the second act, was not foreshortened instead of extending along the whole width of the stage.

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THE three one-act plays which the club is giving on January 20th, 21st and 22nd, are Chehov's **"The Bear,"** Christopher Fry's **"A Phoenix Too Frequent,"** and an original work by a club member, John Darnell, called **"And There We Sat."**

Arnold Wesker's "Roots" had been chosen as the January production, but with the club's participation in the BBC series on the amateur theatre, "Making a Play," it was found impossible to find sufficient time for rehearsals. Three one-acters, each with a small cast, naturally present less difficulty.

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