

# COLLEGE THEATRE AT THE EDINBURGH FESTIVAL

IF THERE is a pleasanter way of passing an hour on this year's Edinburgh Festival Fringe than watching "Nice one Maggie", I'd be very surprised. Morag Fullarton's cautionary tale for young rustic girls lured by the London lights is well presented, in a cosy atmosphere, with really comfortable seating (Lothian Road Church Hall), and enchantingly acted by Barbara Home in conjunction with Murray Ewan's embarrassingly realistic double-dealing recruiter for soft porn photographic models. The Company (Brassneck) is composed of recent graduates from the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama and Jordanhill College, Glasgow, and is smoothly directed by Morag Fullarton.

Another successful threesome is Oxford Theatre Group's "Marzipan Delight", in which Monica Kendall and Mia Soteriou, with a sterling effort by Richard Warren, make an agreeable job of a patchy script whose occasional banalities are not all remediable without surgery. Mia Soteriou neatly directs the weightier "Says I, Says He", by Ron Hutchinson, in which Monica Kendall uses her irresistible melting moo-cow expression to great effect — though she cannot prevent her shiftless defiler Petey from running off to London to seek his fortune with his friend Mick. Petey is a weak braggart with no heart, but with a grand supply of explosively witty lines which are delivered with a deliciously dead pan by Peter Nowlan. Toby Mitchell is deadly as the sadistic IRA man Jigger, and Monica Kendall makes Maeve's predicament touching where many a lesser actress would have made me want to spew. She'll be playing the Duchess of Malfi at Oxford Playhouse late November, and I'd be sad to miss that event.

"Matinee Idol", by Jim Moeller (Swindon College) has the Festival Fringe itself as its subject, with the reunion five years later of an amateur group which enjoyed some success there. It proves remarkably rewarding for the audience which

conversation, easily compensate for any technical deficiencies in this blessedly unpretentious group.

Queen Margaret Drama School, Edinburgh, make a fine presentation of Edward Albee's "The American Dream", an admirably well thought-out and executed production by Ian Dewar, with polished acting from the entire company. I do not happen to rate the play itself at all highly; but that's my problem, not this company's.

It is right to expect fine standards of Bristol Revunions, an amalgam of the University Drama Department and the Old Vic Theatre School; but with John McGrath's "Fish In The Sea" they manage to exceed my highest hopes, by including in their generally excellent company at least two quite remarkable performers. I say at least two because Sheridan Ball (Mary) and Stephen Rawsthorne (Andy) have the parts to prove their exceptional talents, whereas Sally Baxter (effervescent as Fiona), Melissa Murray (maternal Mrs Maconochie), John Graham (the romantic Yorry), and the irresistible Tony Barnes (Rev Griffiths) have to be content with shining brightly in less testing parts. The scenes between Mary and Andy are charged with electrifying drama, of a heart-stopping quality superior to anything I have seen (even in the West End) for a long time: they are magnificent. Andy Jordan's direction is assured; Andy Criddle's designs are both economical and effective; and Phil Nash's new musical numbers (especially "Fish in the sea") could have been written by 7:84's Mark Brown, so perfectly right and catchy are they. The musicians, and singer Liz Nash, give the superb support one has come to expect in Revunions over the years.

Oxford's third, "Wheelchair Willie", by Alan Brown, is not a show for those seeking decent entertainment, but for those game to broaden their theatrical viewing to include degrading and degraded aspects of

life. It is either beyond bad taste or a valuable corrective to commercial theatre — according to the security of your own moral corset, perhaps. But it is undoubtedly strong stuff, played with considerable skill by a company in which Carolyn Colquhoun and Alan Halliday are outstandingly adept at dead-pan comedy (albeit mostly black) and Greg Childs handles the difficult part of the Ph.D. in a wheelchair with surprising ease. Jon Plowman's direction eschews any degeneration of theatrical standards — thank God — and adds considerably to the hilarity of some of the dialogue. Is it worth seeing? Not if you already know enough about the gutter depths you hope never to sink to: but certainly, if you could benefit from a salutary, even comforting, reminder.

Contrived chaos is fun for a while, but needs a well made point or two to prevent its disintegration into mere theatrical game-playing. "Main Sequence" (Bristol again) may have these desirable points, but somehow they failed to come over to me, and the succession of apparently impromptu interruptions, personalised spates of astronomical information, and pleasant songs and dances become a mere procession which passes by without it seeming that even they know their destination. The highly personable, charming, and mostly very talented company are well disciplined by director Andy Jordan and bring considerable fun to the proceedings; but author David Mowat's purpose remains — for me, at least — his secret.

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