

COLLEGE THEATRE

IT WAS a vintage student Edinburgh Fringe this year, with more fine productions than one could cover with ease, few of the shoddy efforts which usually devalue the event, and some real gems: for example, the explosive comic brilliance of sheer verbal dexterity in "Private Dick" (Cambridge University Mumpsters) co-written and directed by Roger Michell, co-written and acted by Richard Maher, starring Paul Hudson and Alan Barker, with Melissa Morse. I name everyone, out of gratitude for an entertainment plun.

So by rights I should also name virtually everyone connected with the breathtakingly designed "Satan's Ball" (Bradford Theatre Group), the powerfully acted and directed "A Respectable Family" (Bristol Revunions), the richly human "Like Dolls or Angels" (Carlisle College of Art & Design), and the sadly comic, impeccably presented "The Death of Private Kowalski" (National Student Theatre Company); but then I should have little space to detail the merits of "Germinal" (Warwick University), "Bugger the Blue Eyes" (Bradford), Brecht's "Lux in Tenebris" and "The Bread Shop" (UC London) and others. The first three named won Fringe First awards — a record crop for students: Bristol and Cambridge for the first time: Bradford as usual.

One person I shall not name is the actress who nearly ruined Louise Page's "Glasshouse" by turning "professional" the day it opened — joining York's TIE Company for the sake of gaining an equity card. "Glasshouse" survived, as it happened, to divide its audiences broadly into the extremely moved and the angrily hostile. Powerful writing indeed. But not a little of the credit must go to Andrew Cuthbert (RADA) whose consistently sterling performances, despite the last-minute loss of the other half of this claustrophobic virtual two-hander, demonstrated admirably the dependable qualities of the enduring true professional.

More details of these and other student shows on the Fringe will be found in the tenth *World Student Drama News*, probably out early December. Edition nine is available now (priced 20p plus 7p postage)

from WSDN, 20 Lansdowne Rd, London N10 2AU, and it contains reports from Italy and the USA, book reviews, details of the National Student Theatre Company's background, and extremely illuminating summaries of last year's NSDF by the judges, who included Jane Howell and Martin Jenkins.

These summaries might be of more than passing interest to aspirants to the next National Student Drama Festival (Durham, March 28 to April 2, 1978) who can obtain details and entry forms from the same address. This 23rd NSDF could be the last of the consecutive annual series started by *The Sunday Times* in 1955 and supported by that paper ever since. Because the paper has limited its contribution to about half what is needed, co-sponsors have been necessary since 1975. No such good fairly has appeared for 1978, so the Festival is under a serious financial cloud.

But it will take place. And, knowing the British talent for rising to adversity, it will be a memorable event. Efforts are now being made to raise the desired money both for the Festival and other deserving student drama projects. An appeal is being organised by the World Student Drama Trust (Patron Peggy Ashcroft) which is also considering running a lottery. Suggestions, offers to act as lottery sales agents (10 per cent commission on sales), donations and requests for covenant forms are all welcomed by the WSDT at the WSDN address given above (telephone 01-883 4586).

The little money the Trust has at present is to continue financing the £100 WSDT Award for the winner of the International Student Playscript Competition. ISPC no. 2 closes on December 31 and will again be judged by Trustee Alan Ayckbourn after preliminary sifting by Professor Peter Thomson of Exeter University Drama Department. For Welshmen, workers or residents in Wales, or anyone with Welsh associations, there's a big money writing contest with the same closing date. For details see letters page of last week's STAGE.

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