

RICHMOND DRAMA AWARDS

A haunting comedy



Katie Barton as the maid Edith in Blithe Spirit

A VERY handsome room design by Alan Corbett provided the setting for *Blithe Spirit*, Noel Coward's evergreen comedy, given a sparkling production by John Kipps for Teddington Theatre Club at Hampton Hill Playhouse last week.

Its director scored a double by not only taking on the leading role of Charles Condomine at the 11th hour, but also giving an urbane and witty performance.

But urbanity and wit epitomises Coward's dialogue, and every one of the cast made the most of it.

Sue Bell brought a gritty edge to her role as Charles's wife Ruth as she suffered the ghostly presence of Catherine Early's haunting Elvira, Charles's first wife, gliding seductively around the stage with wicked, spiteful intent.

Katie Barton made a marvellously hyperactive

Edith, the maid, unwitting conduit to the spirit world, conjured up by intrepid cyclist and best-known medium in the spiritualist theatrical world, Madame Arcati.

This production had Heather Godley magnificently making her first entrance through the French windows, resplendent in gold turban, voluminous black skirts hitched up round her knees. Each succeeding costume was more splendid than the last. Her small Highland Fling dance of triumph on hearing of the 'materialisation' was a joy, but then the whole performance was a delight. "Spiffing" as you might say in her own schoolgirl parlance.

Congratulations should go too to the special effects team who helped the spirits to wreak such final havoc on the set.

Jenny Scott

BLITHE SPIRIT 2001

TEDDINGTON THEATRE CLUB

The joy of the dialogue

TEDDINGTON Theatre Club celebrates two full years at Hampton Hill Playhouse with the Noel Coward classic *Blithe Spirit*.

The great playwright was, of course, born in Teddington and his specially commissioned portrait will smile out enigmatically over what promises to be a whopping great success.

We all know the play. A magnificently eccentric psychic medium, Madame Arcati, conjures up the spirit of a former wife, Elvira, who appears on stage with both ethereal and earthly qualities.

Madame Arcati was famously played by Margaret Rutherford in the opening production in 1941 and in the well-known film. Other big names who have appeared in the play include Kay Kendall, Fay Compton,

film, as a musical, at the National Theatre under Harold Pinter, and widely across the USA, Europe and the Far East.

Director John Kipps is looking forward to repeating the success he enjoyed with the play with Heston Drama Group. Interviewed during casting, he is clearly excited at the prospect of taking another crack at this improbable farce.

"I've loved *Blithe Spirit* since I first saw it 20 years ago. It's an amazing piece given that Coward wrote it in just three or four days, during the darkest moments of the war. The real joy of the play for me is the dialogue. It's witty, economical and acerbic - you can almost hear the Master's clipped tones delivering the lines."

A strong cast includes Heather Godley as the celebrated Madame Arcati,



Katie Barton, John Roth, Cathy Early, Heather Godley, Sue Bell, Barry Hill in Blithe Spirit

Beryl Reid, Dennis Price, John Gielgud and of course Noel Coward himself.

Blithe Spirit ran for 1,997 performances in the West End; the New York production ran for 18 months. It has appeared as a

John Roth as Charles Condomine and Sue Bell as his wife Ruth. Barry Hill plays Dr Bradman, Carol Fuller as Mrs Bradman, Katie Barton as Edith and Cathy Early as the ghostly spirit of Elvira.

Derek West