

STILL LIFE, 2000

TEDDINGTON THEATRE CLUB

A tantalising picture

UNTIL Saturday March 11th at 8.30, Teddington Theatre Club is presenting *Still Life* by Noel Coward at the Hampton Hill Playhouse, 90 High Street, Hampton Hill.

Still Life is a tantalising picture of what might have been - the recreation of an illicit love affair that ends in tears.

When we add that it's set against the background of a smoky pre-War railway station, you'll recognise it as the story that was made into the favourite movie, the 1946 *Brief Encounter*. David Lean directed and Celia Johnson and Trevor Howard were the stars who brought a lump to the throat.

The play was first performed in 1936 as part of the *Tonight at 8.30* series (hence the special starting time!) Originally a vehicle for Coward himself and Gertrude Lawrence, he also wrote *The Red Peppers* and *Fumed Oak* in the same series.

John Roth, last seen in his titanic role in *Long Day's Journey Into Night* at the Playhouse, and Jenny



Back row: Roger Smith, John Roth, Robert Hadden, Paul Loughlin.

Front row: Jan Ryan, Laurie Coombs, Jenny Loughlin, Amanda Franklin.

Laughlin play the doomed lovers, Alec Harvey and Laura Jesson. Both are already married and we watch and wait for the inevitable, wistful ending. Even their last goodbye is ruined by a chance intrusion and they part with only the cold comfort of a handshake.

Behind this tentative affair, a second flirtation is in progress. Ticket collector, Albert Godby played by Roger Smith and Laurie Coombs' station

buffet waitress Myrtle Bagot, provide the background action. Teddington Theatre Club newcomer Amanda Franklin plays Beryl Walters, Myrtle's spirited assistant and Stanley the young man who takes Beryl's fancy is played by Robert Hadden.

This production, appropriately enough takes place in the Noel Coward Studio Theatre, an intimate setting for a closely observed love affair.

Derek West



RICHMOND DRAMA AWARDS

Age of decency and steam

WHAT Jennifer Lacey's production of *Still Life*, for Teddington Theatre Club last week at Hampton Hill Playhouse, evoked for those born in the age of steam trains, was an overwhelming nostalgia for those distant days.

This one-act play by Noel Coward was the basis for David Lean's masterpiece, *Brief Encounter*, released in 1945 and ever since cinema or home video audiences have been wiping away surreptitious tears as Celia Johnson and Trevor Howard parted forever.

Its theme was the falling in love of a middle-aged couple, both comfortably married to other partners. They meet accidentally in the unlikely setting of a

dismal railway station, the suburban housewife and the GP, when he removes a piece of grit from her eye. After another casual encounter they plan to meet again and love blossoms.

Jenny Laughlin and John Roth gave sensitive, low-key performances as Laura and Alex, a deeply conservative pair, more concerned not to hurt anybody than with their own happiness, they relinquish each other. An alien concept these days, but this was in 1936 remember, decency was all!

Comic relief from their poignant meetings was provided by the lugubrious Myrtle Bagot of Laurie Coombs, dispensing threepenny cups of tea to the ill-starred lovers in the station buffet while oozing a general disapproval of

everything and everybody.

And Roger Smith's porter, Albert Godby, was a marvellously exuberant creation, quite undeterred by Myrtle's rebuffs as he attempts to woo and win her.

Garrulous Dolly Messiter was amusingly played by Jan Ryan, and the rest of the cast contributed further diversions.

Although this stage version couldn't have the romance of the clanking iron monsters belching steam and cinders, Charles J Halford and Ken Mason supplied convincing noises off Milford Junction's tea-room which had a suitably dreary set designed by Jennifer Wyatt, complete with buns, paper doyleys and serviceable crockery.

Jenny Scott