

Emotional truth

FEW amdram companies could tackle Arthur Miller's **Death of a Salesman** which requires a cast of exceptional ability to bring emotional truth to the four central roles, speaking with the voices of tragedy and authorial conviction.

This week Teddington Theatre club has found such actors. And Eric Yardley's deeply moving production at Hampton Court Theatre needs no critical or audience indulgence, the more remarkable because his ageing Willy Loman is the relatively young Nick de Kerckhove, until recently a member of Youth Action Theatre.

Weighed down by his cases of samples in the early moments of the play, he reveals Loman as a jaunty salesman in Barton Fink spectacles, his bubble of self-deception riding on a fading smile and a tarnished shoeshine, but constantly renewed by illusory faith in the future, the loyalty of colleagues and his two worthless sons.

David Lewsey gives so powerful a performance as Biff, drifter and sneak thief 'finding things nobody lost', that the role almost shares top billing with Loman. And David Wheatley creates an equally strong portrayal of son Happy as the mendacious Lothario, vividly sketching in the character in a brief restaurant encounter with Anneke Sando's Miss Forsythe.

But in this play age and experience still count. Susan Besil is almost unrecognisable in the most naturalistic performance I can recall of Linda Loman, desperately pleading for attention to be paid to Willy, drawing the family together in scene after scene, and quietly underlining the irony of the paid-off mortgage in the closing moments at the graveside.

DEATH OF A
SALESMAN

1992

Jack Smerdon's erect stance in tropical whites gives a ghostly presence to Uncle Ben. Peter Slater also provides the required gravitas with a Charley he brilliantly ages from bemused, card-playing neighbour to business elder statesman donating bucks to his beleaguered friend, and towering figure at the funeral.

A special word of praise too for former YAT mem-

bers Martin Freeman as the bespectacled swot turned barrister, David Hannigan as the barman with the most successful transatlantic account, and Lynn Howes as Willy's out of town woman in the hotel room. Gordon Wood has created a splendidly expressionist setting, although there seems uncertainty about the precise location of downstage entry points.

John Thaxter