

The Pride of  
Miss Jean  
Brodie, 1994

#### TEDDINGTON THEATRE CLUB

## Echoes of Edinburgh

BY coincidence two productions of *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* end their local run tomorrow. Last week I reviewed the professional presentation at the Yvonne Arnaud, paralleled this week by Anne Low's amdram staging for Teddington Theatre Club.

Both give a gently witty, Scottish-accented account of Jay Presson Allen's play, drawn from Muriel Spark's novel about the charismatic Edinburgh school teacher, whose romantic fervour and fascist sympathies finally led to her downfall.

Gordon Edwards' design creates four main playing areas on the Hampton Court Theatre's open stage, backed by a fixed central wall. This is pierced with a rose window, echoed in a painted moon (in daylight?) on the rear wall. Awkwardly, Miss Brodie's classroom and Miss

Mackay's study share the same desk and the incriminating picture of Il Duce.

In the half empty theatre (as on Sunday evening) the notorious echo creates a problem for a mainly female cast, making it a strain to follow swift exchanges of dialogue and robbing the humour of its spontaneity.

Sarah Shelton, young for the role of a woman in her middle-aged 'prime', gives an attractive, beautifully modulated performance as Miss Brodie, with fine costumes closer to 30s reality than those in the Guildford production. But her realistic portrayal smooths away some aspects of the character's manic triumphalism and spinsterly dottiness.

Michael Norman splendidly kilted looks every inch a Scot as the music teacher Mr Lowther. And Jon Scarrott gives a

growling, aggressive performance as Teddy Lloyd, head of the art department believably daubing at an oil portrait in his cluttered studio.

I was disconcerted to notice that Jennifer Laney's performance as the headmistress, peering disapprovingly over her reading glasses, bears a passing resemblance to the late John Smith MP of Edinburgh. And I tried to avoid seeing a horn-rimmed likeness to comedian Ronnie Corbett in Sally Graves's cheeky young Sandy.

The main cast is completed by Sue Bell's nun and Allen Dickens's American journalist, thankless roles as a superfluous framing device; and Tessa Baddeley, Catherine Early and Cath Hardy as senior members of the Brodie 'set'.

John Thaxter

## ...more creme

TEDDINGTON Theatre Club opens its Autumn Season at Hampton Court Theatre with the presentation of Jay Presson Allen's adaptation of Muriel Spark's novel *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, to be directed by Anne Low.

Most people have heard the name Jean Brodie and can identify her as a Scottish schoolmistress of the 30s who had, to say the least, radical views on education. She is one of modern theatre's more interesting characters, along with that of the headmistress, Miss Mackay, with whom she clashes.

Director Anne Low was educated in Edinburgh, and swears that she can personally identify two Brodie teachers who influenced her in her teenage years.

Jean Brodie and Miss Mackay are played respectively by Sarah Shelton and Jennifer Laney, both comparatively new to the TTC

stage, while the elite group of girls, elevated by Brodie to be her creme de la creme are played by Tessa Baddeley, Catherine Early and Catherine Hardy. Two of this year's nominations for this newspaper's Swan Awards, Sue Bell and Jon Scarrott, are also included in the cast.

The set designed by Gordon Edwards, reflects the Scottish background, providing illusion rather than reality, which, indeed is the basic theme of this intriguing play, as Jean Brodie eventually finds it difficult to separate her romantic illusions from the less palatable truth.

Tickets for members are £5 and details of audience membership (at £5 p.a., concs. £2.50) may be obtained from the membership secretary on 081-943 3322. Performances every evening at 7.45pm from September 10th - 17th.