

THE
LARK
1994

Richmond Drama Awards

Theatrical devices



THROUGHOUT Jean Anouilh's *The Lark*, based on Joan of Arc's "own story", he is constantly reminding us of its theatricality.

So the device (whether the author's or director's) of women playing men and vice versa, completely 'straight' in Teddington Theatre Club's production of the play at Hampton Court Theatre last week seemed absolutely right.

In the case of Ben Martin, he not only skillfully directed this tragi-comedy, but also took on a multiplicity of roles on and off stage.

As Commander of the English, the Earl of Warwick, he was amusingly effete. He also played the Dauphin's 'Young Queen' suitably po-faced, La Tremouille, Constable of the Army and was impressively chilling as The Inquisitor.

What seemed to be a large cast was in fact seven

players creating seventeen mostly diverse characters.

Mike Walters, perhaps most successful as Beaudicourt, the bluff Squire of Vau Couleurs, was also Joan's father in the opening scenes; later a French Captain and a vacillating Dauphin.

Yvonne George was Joan's practical mother, the Hangman, a Guard and the Archbishop of France with a marvellously metallic delivery like a 15th century religious Dalek.

In the first scene Melanie Horrocks appeared as Joan's squabbling brother, transformed at the French Court into the vivacious mistress of the Dauphin, Agres Solel, then later the attendant priest at Joan's trial, touchingly pleading for clemency.

One of the given reasons for Anouilh's plays' immense popularity in France and Britain was their potential for wide interpretation. His Maid of Orleans - the 'lark' - is a creature of contradictions but Natalia

Von Lobkowitz's portrayal is consistently of a girl of rare simplicity and single-minded determination.

Even when the author provides her with words of guile in scenes with the Squire and the Dauphin, Natalia plays her harmlessly as sweetly cunning.

Perversely, it seems, or perhaps eschewing the obvious, Anouilh interrupts the burning of Joan at the stake and takes his characters back to her triumphant moment as Charles the Dauphin is crowned.

In an evening of some *longeurs* and some memorable performances, Graham Holliday was outstanding as Bishop of Beauvais. In the trial scene with Julian Fox as the scarlet-robed Promoter, spitting venom at the battle-dressed Maid and Ben Martin as the hawk-like Inquisitor, this quartet created one of the most stunning moments, visually and dramatically, I've seen on any stage.

Jenny Scott