

ALPHABETICAL
ORDER

1988

AMATEUR DRAMA AWARDS

Disorganised chaos

AT SUNDAY'S curtain call for **Alphabetical Order**, lovingly revived this week by Teddington Theatre Club, my neighbour glanced at her programme for the names of the stage crew to include them in her applause.

And Hampton Court stage managers Fiona Andrews and Sarah Tyler are the hardest worked members of the team assembled by director Roger Smith to stage Michael Frayn's comedy of life in a provincial newspaper office, the first by this author to win a major award.

Within Paul Edwards' realistic library setting (with props by Linda Fitzpatrick and Gillian Temple), they must first amass the disorganised chaos of the cuttings service which Jill Schaverein's librarian cum mother confessor operates

using a dump system. And they then spend frantic interval minutes creating crisply efficient tidiness for a second act dominated by Helen Smith's alphabetically orderly assistant.

But (and I hope mentioning it won't spoil your fun) at the end of the show they have the chore of clearing up an ankle-deep mess of many thousand newspaper clippings, the result of a cathartic celebration in the riotous closing moments of the play.

In fact, when the original production transferred from Hampstead to the Mayfair Theatre, the fire brigade made the stage management job so difficult that the play can now be seen only in club conditions. So be sure to catch this rare and splendid revival.

Mrs Schaverein gives a definitive, warmly appealing performance as best friend to a bunch of eccentric newsmen; every press office needs someone like this to wash shirts and mend broken hearts.

But the future clearly belongs to Helen Smith's tough organising genius — thirteen years on she would be first to master direct computer

input — her character speaking more through body language than dialogue.

Steve Alais' leader writer is perhaps, as it were, slightly more abstract than the Manchester Guardian original that author Frayn had in mind. His dry philosophic ramblings shouldn't sound like so much verbal wallpaper — there's intellectual grist hidden among these burblings. But he brings mischievous delights to scenes of tangential courtship.

Ken Mason gives his best ever performance as the office treasure, with beautifully observed twitches, and Chris Eyre is dead right as the features editor, prancing around in new shoes or rattling dangly earrings at Keith Collins' amusingly stolid, secret boozier. And, though I don't recall seeing Doug Andrews before, his ebullient portrait of a sad joker who leads with a quip to hide his deafness is a small miracle of casting and characterisation.

The production (last performance tomorrow, don't miss it) has been entered for our Amateur Drama Awards. **John Thaxter**

Comedy for New Year

A SPARKLING modern comedy by Michael Frayn, **Alphabetical Order** directed by Roger Smith, opens Teddington Theatre Club's new season for 1988 at their own Hampton Court Theatre on January 23rd.

This witty and entertaining play is set in the chaotic confusion of the library of a provincial newspaper where Lucy, played by Jill Schaverein, presides with warmth and

an easy attitude over her staff until Leslie, a new cool and efficient young assistant, played by Helen Smith, arrives and reorganises them all.

Performances are at 7.45 pm and the play runs from Saturday January 23rd to Saturday January 30th. Members' tickets are available from the box office on 898 5295. For details of membership telephone 399 2318.