

BEDROOM
FARCE
1988

AMATEUR DRAMA AWARDS



Most entertaining

A WEEK or so ago, at a large official gathering, a borough arts person made the crass off-the-cuff remark that amateur artists and performers were somehow a second-rate breed.

As partial restitution he should be sent to Hampton Court Theatre this evening or tomorrow and made to eat his words. Not that seeing Teddington Theatre Club present Alan Ayckbourn's **Bedroom Farce** would be in any way a punishment. Far from it.

Exposed as I am to the best and worst of amateur and professional theatre, I would place Ken Mason's beautifully paced production among the ten most entertaining shows I've seen this year. And it seems a pity it won't transfer to, say, the Lyric Hammersmith where it would surely get better reviews and do better business than many a recent professional production.

You learn a lot about a couple by glancing at their bedroom, says an occupant of one of the three double-bedded rooms (superbly designed and lit by Phillip Sinclair and Mike Elgey) which straddle the stage.

On the left is Heals modern, at present a sick-bay for Nick (Allen Dickens) immobilised by a splintered spine, while his pretty wife Jan (Patti Bottomley) goes off partying.

The party-givers' bed-

room at centre stage-front is undergoing destruction by DIY at the hands of beefy Malcolm (Peter Slater), whose cuddly wife Kate (Jill Schaverien) sometimes thinks about laying carpets while he sexually performs.

Rear-stage is the chilly, old fashioned bedroom of retired Ernest (Jack Smerdon) and Delia (Heather Godley) who love a naughty snack in bed to make up for a disappointing restaurant meal, but have forgotten to switch on their blanket.

An unseen fourth bedroom, belonging to Trevor (Phil Hickson) and Susannah (Sally Lomax), is temporarily unoccupied while these sportive neutrons carry their destructive quarrel into the homes, the bedrooms and even the beds of the other six characters.

Eight fine comedy performances don't quite eliminate an occasional impression of casting from available actors. But Heather Godley, last seen nearly three years ago as a wonderfully comic Malaprop, gives the performance of the evening and perhaps the year, as Trevor's baffled but indulgent mother.

Her immaculate comedy timing, acute observation of character and situation, and her delicate grace are a sheer joy to watch. This is a star performance.

John Thaxter