

DARKNESS  
AT NOON  
1990

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## ENTERTAINMENT

### RICHMOND DRAMA AWARDS

# Soviet history lesson

**ARTHUR** Koestler's *Darkness at Noon*, translated from the German and published here in 1941, was the first major novel to explore the inhuman horror of the Stalinist purges and show trials of the Thirties.

Also drawing on the three months he spent in a Falangist death cell, his book was an indictment of all forms of totalitarianism.

This week director Roger Smith is giving Teddington Theatre Club members a rare opportunity to see Sidney Kingsley's Broadway stage adaptation.

Produced in 1951, the play sharpens the Soviet history lesson and adds a scene of 'bourgeois sentimentality' to Koestler's satire. But what else could a Theatre Guild play-

wright be seen doing at the height of Senator McCarthy's anti-communist witch hunt?

Although the New York critics gave Kingsley's play their annual award (shared, as it happens, with *Guys and Dolls*), it never crossed the Atlantic, and this week is probably your only chance to see it performed.

Sadly Hampton Court Theatre was half empty on Sunday evening, the absentees missing a vivid, strongly-cast production in an atmospheric prison setting by Jon Scarrott, superbly lit by Martin Thomas, with a subtle sound track by John Roth and Chris Dapre.

Most of all they were missing a powerful central performance by David Helmy, this time curiously enough looking rather like

Lenin as the prisoner Rubashov, a member of the old revolutionary vanguard, fighting the crushing party system.

The confrontational scenes with his two interrogators, kind soldierly chum Ivanov (Doug Andrews) and the relentless *apparatchik* Gletkina (Charlotte Goddard), make for riveting theatre, as do the brief tender moments of retrospective passion with Kate Garman as his secretary and mistress.

Jack Smerdon makes a notable contribution as a long term prisoner in the next cell; Karim Peermohamed plays a torture victim; while John Hocking, Keith Collins, Ben Dore and Robert Wittenham double effectively in several roles.

Recommended.

John Thaxter