

THE EXORCISM

1991

RICHMOND DRAMA AWARDS

Shivery quality

THIS week's Teddington Theatre club presentation of Don Taylor's chilling Christmas ghost story *The Exorcism* is in some ways an exorcism for the play itself. And it isn't only the cool Hampton Court Theatre that gives the production its shivery quality.

First written for BBC television in 1972, it was presented in an unauthorised, melodramatic stage version at the Comedy Theatre in 1975. That production is now remembered only for the tragic death of its leading actress Mary Ure, who choked on barbiturate after attending the first night champagne party.

But TTC director Paul Lawrence is presenting Don Taylor's original text in a staging notable for its restraint and realism, with calming moments of wry humour that allow the powerful story of psychic possession to take its gradual but inexorable hold.

It would be wrong for

me to give any outline of the plot beyond saying that the setting (an excellent design by Lyn Randall) is a remote but comfortable country cottage where two couples, old friends, are spending a self-indulgent Christmas, if not without a pang of guilt at their affluence in a starving world.

Roger Smith and Laurie Coombs (strongly cast against type in the Ure role) play the upwardly mobile, forty-something owners who have refurbished a long abandoned farmworkers' hovel with every luxury money can buy; John Roth as a complacent journalist and Sue Bell as his self-assured wife are their envious Yuletide guests.

As well as the fine cast (well rehearsed despite some difficulties), the story gains credibility from close attention to technical detail; the clever selection and use of props; unfussy but highly effective light and sound; and the smooth stage management.

The author and his family, joining the Sunday night audience, were clearly enthralled by this accomplished production. Don't miss it.