

THE HAPPY MARRIAGE, 1991

RICHMOND DRAMA AWARDS

Lavish rooftop setting but frugal script

WHEN John Clements' production of *The Happy Marriage* opened in the West End on a hot evening in August 1952, the star-struck *Theatre World* magazine implied that its appeal was due solely to Clements and his wife Kay Hammond in the leading roles, and to Laurence Irving's London roof-garden setting with a background of stars and twinkling lights.

This week at Hampton Court Theatre the play has been given an affectionate revival by Jimmie Chinn, and I'm delighted to report that Jean Goodwin's lavish garden setting, furnished by Squires Garden Centre, reproduces the brilliant original (minus a twinkling light or two) with only slight changes to the architectural details.

With excellent lighting by Chris Davies this is a set that could well grace a West End stage; as are the Fifties clothes

by a quartet of costumiers. The director has also inspired his experienced Teddington Theatre Club cast of seven (all characters are in their 'middle years') to act their socks off.

Alas the play itself, so well served by this design, directing and performing talent, lacks the comic juice and dramatic impetus to hold us for two hours traffic of the stage: not only because of its improbabilities but also an absence of any real emotional conflict.

The plot, taken from a French romantic farce, is

sheer froth; poking fun at pompous psychiatry (Allen Dickens as a smooth shrink), with a successful architect (Anthony Nelson) and his cloying security of their happy marriage requires the help of a temporary flutter outside - for which they seek the help of their closest friends, with imagined results.

Nevertheless, as well as the setting and costumes, there are several performing highlights that make the production worth the attention of the TTC club members.

These include a delicious tongue-tied performance by Kenneth Mason as the best friend, Gillia Mason as his wife, seemingly dressed for an episode of *I Love Lucy*, and a cameo gem by Cynthia Carss as the dotting secretary. Keith Collins as a confused manservant completes an excellent cast.—John Thaxter