

THE LESSON

HOME

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TEDDINGTON THEATRE CLUB

## Matching the best

PROTOCOL disqualifies Teddington Theatre Club's so-called studio productions from taking part in the Drama Awards scheme. For "studio" read directors' audition piece, and it's possible to see the logic behind the decision.

But in the case of Rodney Figaro, with a long-established record of fine productions for other companies, the audition is presumably a mere formality. And his staging of David Storey's *Home* last week offered appreciative Hampton Court audiences a production and acting performances to match the best of this year's crop of Awards entries.

Like its title, the play's setting - 'the terrace of a house in the country' - is deliberately ambiguous. The first act is spent listening to a diffident pre-prandial encounter between a pair of bruised elderly gentlemen, perhaps retired to a hotel.

Only with the arrival of two vulgar ladies and a muscular oddity in the background, does it emerge that the scene is a lunatic asylum. The author claims he was half way through writing the play before he realised this himself.

The original Royal Court production was a late showcase for Richardson and Gielgud. Sir Ralph took the role of Jack because he was good at card tricks, leaving Sir John to play the tearful, laconic Harry.

But it's clear from Figaro's revival that the parts might have been better cast the other way round. Ashley Hodgson, slim and dapper, with a beautifully modulated voice, gave a Gielgudian airy lightness to Jack's verbal avoidance of reality. While Len Court's haunted lachrymal Harry recalled the tangential Richardson style of playing. And both these actors normally seen in supporting roles, gave what

must be their best performances to date.

Marion McLaren and Cynthia Carse were equally memorable as the enjoyably sharp-tongued vulgarians, as was Alan Knight's simpleton - emphasised by subtle make-up.

The play's structure is often discussed in musical terms. Here the blocking was not so much choreographed as scored in the Mozartian manner, against a beautifully lit autumnal setting, that achieved realism with the simplest means.

The evening began with Ionesco's *The Lesson* as a curtain-raiser, a would-be ambiguous piece described by someone in the row behind me as "an intellectual version of *Arsenic and Old Lace*". Stephen Pratt and his cast gave it their best but were defeated by Ionesco's blatantly unsubtle sub-text.

John Thaxter