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THE RIVALS

2 Times, Friday, February 7, 1986

ENTERTAINMENT

AMATEUR DRAMA AWARDS

A bold choice for Teddington

FIRST company in 1986 with a nomination for the Richmond Arts Council amateur drama awards, the Teddington Theatre Club last week presented Sheridan's *The Rivals*.

With the national Theatre's award-winning production still fresh in the memory, this was a bold choice. But director Ken Mason gave the play a completely fresh look by setting it 'in the round' with the playing space separated from the audience by an octagon of eight slender columns, linked by arches.

If this occasionally felt too much like a Georgian theatre for comfortable, unhindered sight-lines, it was used with ingenuity and wit to provide the dozen different settings, merely by the addition of four elegant chairs and some hand props.

This was a production that introduced me to the comedy talents of Heather Godley and Jack Smerdon who, as Mrs Malaprop and the geriatric Sir Anthony Absolute, were the undoubted stars of the evening.

I cannot recall any previous production that has made such effective comedy from Malaprop's nice derangement of epitaphs', entirely free of the usual verbal quotation marks that kill the joke. And her main scene with Absolute, crowned (if that is the word) by a gentle goosing, was delightful.

Stephen Bentley was a little unbending as the roguish Absolute junior, but was good fun in the 'discovery' scene. John Roth was in excellent Oirish form as Sir Lucius, and Niall Trimble and Barry Evans were nicely contrasted as Acres and Faulkland.

The girls seemed apt to gabble their lines in the first scene or two; and I would have liked to see more character differentiation between Linda Russell's Lydia and Kate Garman's Julia (not helped by identical wigs).

But they lapsed happily into romantic comedy once the scene had been set.

In a minor but well-played role, David Smith caught the eye as Fag. **John Thaxter.**