

ABIGAIL'S PARTY 1982

Hostess with the mostest

WHEN a professional theatre company revives a play the owner of the copyright usually declares a close season for any other production, amateur or professional. It protects the box office as well as avoiding the possibility of odious comparisons.

Unfortunately this doesn't apply to major television presentations and, more than once, Teddington Theatre Club has found one of its shows clashing with a prestigious version on the box. It's happened again this week. Hard on the heels of the acclaimed Mike Leigh television season, TTC are presenting their own production of his play *Abigail's Party* at Hampton Court Theatre.

Actually the local company survives the comparison with considerable credit, even though the direction by Gerry Jones closely follows the pace, blocking and vocal intonations of the author's own celebrated version. In fact much of the conversational buzz during the interval last Monday evening was devoted to acknowledging this agreeable fact.

Main credit must go to the formidable talents of two newcomers to TTC, here making their debut performances with the club. Bernice Slynn as hostess

Beverly is a knock-out in every aspect of the role: social-climbing philistine, tart with a gold-plated heart, glammed-up leader of the female pack, and ball-breaking consort. You could see the evening was in capable hands from the opening moment when she fixed her first drink while swaying to Feliciano on the music centre, though several of her laugh lines went by unnoticed.

The tricky role of Ange, nurse and social simpleton, gave Linda Russell the chance to plunge in as a Janine Duvitski look-alike in a performance that kept the audience chuckling until the last tragic minutes that turn the laughs to tears.

The other three characters merely provide a social background for these larger-than-life performances and were well interpreted by TTC stalwarts Dorothy Jones, David Tickner and Michael Norman.

Fiona Andrews' excellent set re-creates 13 Richmond Avenue in every grisly detail and I was grateful for the chance at last to see that erotic picture brought down from the bedroom—an opportunity denied by the television version—and to confirm my own guess about which one Mike Leigh had in mind.

John Thaxter