

HEDDA
GABLER

1984

Teddington Theatre Club.

Perfectly judged Hedda

JIMMY CHINN'S perfectly judged production of *Hedda Gabler* for Teddington Theatre Club is a small scale gem, a memorable evening of theatre.

After the first night in 1890 Ibsen pointed out that Hedda was not a "so-called problem" but a human being quietly despairing under the pressures of a ridiculous marriage and grinding social obligation. Instead of the usual snarling vixen, Pattie Bottomley fizzles like an unexploded bomb, letting us hear the alarming tick under her glacial exterior, and keeping us on tenterhooks right up to her final exit — just as the author wanted it to be played.

I doubt if I shall ever see this part acted with more conviction or intelligence — and beauty — and the pace of her performance provides the momentum for the other members of the cast.

John Roth as fat-cat Judge Brack, with this Hedda, reveals the character as a vulgar small-town bully with delusions of sophisticated sensuality — an interpretation that is pivotal to the final moment of tragedy.

Eilert Lovborg, the self-destructive genius, is probably unplayable as written — Ibsen simply fails to convey his literary brilliance

under the tarnished exterior. But Peter Slater gives him a craggy grandeur that serves the need. I shall long remember the scene when Christine Mason's Thea sits unsuspectingly beside him on the settle, Hedda on the carpet between them, a charge of sexual energy coursing through their clasped hands.

For once, in David Helmy's performance, Tesman is not a total wet (usually the audience is baffled by his marriage with Hedda), and excellent support comes from Win Couchman as Aunt Juli and Hazel Banting as Bertha the maid.

Jimmy Chinn's decision to break for the interval in the middle of Act 2, at the moment when Lovborg makes his first entrance, gives the play an added sense of continuity so that the events seem to roll on almost without interruption — paradoxical but true.

The wonderfully atmospheric set by Gordon Edwards uses the full height of the stage of the Hampton Court theatre with Chris Davies' lighting seeming to come from through the tall, elegant french windows, or from table lamps.

The final performance is tomorrow evening — not to be missed.

John Thaxter