

COME AS
YOU ARE
1975

Back on marriage lines

MARRIAGE never ceases to fascinate playwrights, many of whom would appear to base their observations on personal experience.

John Mortimer has done just that in a couple of plays, but his comedy quartet *Come as You Are*, presented by Teddington Theatre Club last week, is in a lighter vein altogether.

"Comedy," said Mr. Mortimer once, "is the only thing worth writing in this despairing age." Some people believe it is the only thing worth watching too.

The four one-acts at Hampton Court, all directed by Louise Papillon, were certainly worth watching, especially the two longer pieces either side of the interval.

"Gloucester Road," my favourite, is about a mid-

dle-aged marriage built on the husband's firm belief that his wife is having an affair with the lodger. The audience is also led to believe this state of affairs for a while, but it soon becomes clear that the most they ever get up to is blowing kisses across the cornflakes.

This cosy little *menage à trois* is disrupted by the arrival of a pot-smoking hippie from Guildford, a very funny and improbable performance by Sally Bishop. David Evans and Tina Ashton played the ill-suited couple, and John Roth adopted an unforgettable air of glazed stupidity as the lodger.

"Bermondsey," the most serious of the four, takes a compassionate view of homosexuality within marriage. The wife of a publican

is more upset by her husband's flirtation with a pretty barmaid than by his well-established "friendship" with an old army friend.

Jeff Beauchamp's set really did look like the back room of a pub and all the players suited their roles admirably. David Evans and Tina Ashton were husband and wife again, very different but no less convincing, and two of TTC's newer faces, Alan Drake and Kate O'Byrne, were both impressive as the boyfriend and the barmaid.

Kate O'Byrne also appeared in the first piece, "Mill Hill," a laboured *divertissement* about a dentist who likes to dress up as Sir Walter Raleigh as long as his mistress agrees to play Queen Elizabeth. Phil Hickson, as the kinky tooth-picker, was inclined to overplay the quick reactions, almost twitching himself off stage a couple of times. John Roth appeared as the husband who catches them in full costume.

In "Marble Arch," a fallen screen idol, wafting around her plush apartment in a negligée and warpaint, discovers that her lover from the House of Lords (Alan Drake) has collapsed and, she assumes, died in her bathroom. She summons the caretaker (Phil Hickson) to transplant the "corpse" to some more discreet venue.

Heather Godley had great fun with the infamous Laura Logan—"No I won't spell it," she hisses down the telephone, "it used to be a household word"—and it was clear from her performance that she had encountered such a monster in fact or fiction.

One cannot begin to imagine the problems of staging four separate plays in one evening, with complete scene changes for each one. Louise Papillon and Jeff Beauchamp, director and designer respectively, not only imagined the problems but overcame them triumphantly.