

# Carry on lusting!

ALAN BENNETT wrote **Habeas Corpus** before the permissive society became a cliché, but that doesn't prevent it from being as relevant today as it was five years ago.

Not only relevant, but just as funny too. Lust, frustration and body consciousness have been laughed at for years and Bennett's distinctive brand of intelligent ribaldry adds a new dimension to an old chestnut.

All the characters in "Habeas Corpus", being presented at Hampton Court Theatre this week, are comedy stereotypes, from the cut-out char, Mrs. Swabb, to the rather more three-dimensional doctor, Arthur Wicksteed, lusting after nubile patients with menopausal abandon.

Other characters look and sound as if they've just stepped off a "Carry On" set—Felicity Rumpers, Canon Throbbing, Sir Percy Shorter, etc. Bennett obviously has great respect for the British tradition of dirty postcard humour, to which he has added his own, often profound, thoughts and aphorisms about sex and our obsession with the physical.

"I'm getting more like the Queen Mother every day," exclaims the respectable, middle-aged Muriel Wicksteed despondently, and consoles herself by attempting to seduce a false bosom fitter who mistakes her ample chest for a set of his own appliances (definite shades of Orton here).

Directing his first full-length play for Teddington Theatre Club, Roger Smith chose his cast carefully, with a good mixture of old favourites and new faces. He paced it well and extracted a generally high standard of performance.

Heather Goodley, as the predatory Mrs. Wicksteed, was so happily cast and in tune with the playwright's mood that, inadvertently, she cast a shadow over some of the less successful performances. David Payne

did extremely well as the jaded, lustful doctor despite a big age gap between actor and role.

Newcomer Jeremy Siddle was funnier, I thought, than the original West End performance as Dennis, the Wicksteeds' hypochondriac drip of a son, and Hazel Wyld, though neither flat-chested nor spinsterish, did what she could with the mousey Constance.

Patti Bottomley as Felicity Rumpers (or was it the other way round?) looked more delectable than ever and Dorothy Jones gave us a formidable Lady Rumpers. Melinda Rugby's nose-y char, though more than adequate, might have been funnier, as might Canon Throbbing, given an almost demonic interpretation by Barry Evans. Tony Eva did his self-important dignitary act with a flourish, Doug Andrews made an appealing bosom tester and Terry Brant looked the part of a man who never quite succeeds in doing away with himself.

HABEAS  
CORPUS  
1977