

HAYFEVER, 1972

# Play that eludes the best amateurs

Noel Coward considers *Hay Fever* to be "one of the most difficult plays to perform that I have ever encountered." And he should know.

I have yet to see an amateur production of "Hay Fever" that is worthy of Coward's masterly comedy of manners. There have been good ones, bad ones, indifferent ones, but not yet a real winner.

It would take, I suppose, a true perfectionist to do justice to a play in which every line can be made to sound like a spontaneous quip from the playwright in person.

Badly done, it is just another drawing room comedy, with some witty

lines here and there. Well done, it may be elevated to the ranks of classic comedy, with wit and laughter pouring forth in equal proportions from either side of the footlights.

I had high hopes of Teddington Theatre Club's production, which has been playing all this week at Hampton Court Theatre. Too high perhaps.

All but three members of the cast were newcomers to TTC, so we knew from the start that the director, Lister Laurence, was brave if nothing else.

Only the bravest of directors would have cast Pamela Milsom, an attractive brunette in her late twenties, as Judith Bliss, the outrageously passé leading lady,

who has been immortalised by such veterans as Edith Evans and Celia Johnson.

Mrs. Milsom made an elegant, or should I say, glamorous Judith, posturing madly and commanding attention, but her performance lacked a certain discipline and, dare I say it, maturity. It was good, certainly, but it didn't work for me.

If may sound strange, but I think you have to begin with the right physical types for a play like "Hay Fever."

Judith must look as if she's had a lifetime on the boards, Myra Arundel must look a predatory vamp, Sandy Tyrell must look a clueless athlete and so on.

If you can't accept the characters physically as

soon as they appear, it makes it more difficult for each individual player to establish his or her character.

Sue Roberts, for instance, wasn't my idea of Myra Arundel at all, but she obviously worked very hard to play at being chic and predatory and bitchy. She succeeded to some extent, but I could not readily accept her in the part.

Stephen Malton was much more like the traditional Sandy, all breezy platitudes and striped blazers. Although he sometimes looked as if he had been roped in at the last minute, Stephen provided most of the laughs.

Poor casting was to blame for the unsuitability of Mary Davies as Sorel and

Linda Simons as Jackie, the flapper. They would have been better off the other way round.

Terry Hepple made a spirited stab at Simon and another newcomer, Rush Dray, was an appropriate choice for the sturdy diplomat, Richard Greatham.

Two of the club's old established members, Anthony Eva and Chloe Crabbe, took care of David, the writer husband of Judith, and Clara, the disagreeable maid.

The production was, on the whole, disappointing, not only because it failed to match up to TTC's usually high standards but also because it failed to win the laurels I had dearly hoped to heap upon it.