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SUNBEAMS/
CHAMBER MUSIC

Actors do best with disturbing stuff

No one could accuse Teddington Theatre Club of playing safe in its jubilee season, and least of all in its first two Studio productions of the year: a double bill of disturbing and, I imagine for some people, unacceptable plays—Rosemarie Mason's *Sunbeams*, and Arthur Kopit's *Chamber Music*.

Sunbeams is everything I hate in a play — crude in language, static in effect, lacking in drama and with nothing going for it save two plum parts for women and the capability of shocking the more timid of audiences.

That said, I have the highest praise for Guy Belchamber's direction of the play. He almost managed to make the wretched thing palatable!

Laurie Coombs made a good attempt at the role of Lou, the insecure prostitute, but she could not overcome the basic falseness of the character as written. Marianne Smith laboured mightily with the impossible part of Frances, the social worker who becomes Lou's partner. Neither was able to make me overcome my extreme distaste for the play with its half-digested ideas on behavioural patterns.

Arthur Kopit's play is a

very different animal indeed. Here is true allegory, drawn in terms of the inmates of the female ward of a mental hospital and one that has a genuine moment of horror at the end. It works because it accepts the logic of irrational behaviour on the part of the women with their assumptions of historical characters.

There were some marvelous performances — most notably from Chloe Crabbe as the implacable Susan B. Anthony, and Davina Andrews as an enchanting Amelia Earhart. Susan Doyle was magnificent as the explorer Osa Johnson and Rita Smidman touchingly funny as Frau Mozart.

That leaves Dorothy Jones, admirably still for most of the play as Isabella of Spain, and the only two men in the cast — Doug Andrews and Colin Roberts as the two warders.

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