

1981

Middx. Chron.

# Precision gave play a life of its own

JOHN Mortimer's play *Collaborators* is a study of a marriage under threat.

The threat comes from within as well as from without, and one ignores the deeper levels of the stream of consciousness at one's peril.

The play is one of the few that, while it has a distinct beginning, middle

and end, creates the impression that the characters have an independent life

In Teddington Theatre Club's production of the play at Hampton Court Theatre this week, director Dorothy Jones established this sense of continuity with uncanny precision. Her handling of what is, in all essentials, an eminently truthful play an object lesson in translating drama from page to stage.

The cast of four was variable in conviction and achievement, but they worked well together.

The lion's share of the play fell on David Tickner as Henry Winter, fledgling lawyer and playwright, bedevilled by financial problems and possessed of a wry, yet far from, misanthropic view of the world.

Mr. Tickner grew into the part as the play progressed — the early scenes were a touch monotonous, but once he varied the pitch, timing and emphasis of the lines, Henry Winter came to life.

Lyndsey Ritman-Mear was a slight disappointment in the way she played Katherine, Henry's wife.

The basic problem lay in a lack of variety in her delivery. Only twice, when she and Henry indulged in an impromptu song and dance, and later in a reading of Henry's film script, did she breathe life into the woman.

John Roth played Sam Brown, a film producer of doubtful provenance, whose accent is just sufficiently insecure to raise doubts in everyone's minds. It was a gem of a performance.

The rather smaller role of Griselda Griffin, a young and comely solicitor's clerk, was beautifully understated by Laurie Coombs.

Fiona Andrew's design was excellent, suitably cluttered, yet with enough space for the action to continue unimpeded.

There was a slight fall from grace in the handling of the sounds of the children — they are never seen, but their presence as sounds is very important, and they simply did not seem to exist — a pity, because all the other production values were so high.

GEORGE ALLAN

## Matrimony in the dock

In *Collaborators*, a play by John Mortimer, presented last week by Teddington Theatre Club at Hampton Court Theatre, the girl falls for the boy when she sees him coming in from the garden in his muddy Wellingtons. It turns out that they weren't his, he had borrowed them. The play opens when they had got half a dozen children and appear to be fed up with them and with each other.

In comes a third party and the wife agrees to marry him, but changes her mind and returns to her husband with whom, it seems, she would rather go on being fed up.

This is all acted out in long talks mainly about having nothing to talk about. The husband, a barrister-cum-writer-cum-cook, like the author, is given to the kind of verbal posturing which quickly palls. David Tickner and Lyndsey Ritman-Mear had exhausted most of the clichés of matrimonial strife, from nappy

washing to embarrassing phone calls by the time John Roth appeared on the scene to shake things up a bit.

Though not on the surface offering much of a challenge as a lover, Mr. Roth supplied a dynamism which made credible his initial conquest. If he somewhat over-stressed the brashness of the character, this was an understandable reaction against the flatness of the dialogue.

There was nothing that these two good actors or the attractive Miss Ritman-Mear could do to impart warmth to these stereotypes. The third act song and dance routine, obviously intended as a sneer at the pre-permissive age, was a nice theatrical stroke to cheer everybody up. Laurie Coombs's few appearances as the unlikely third woman were welcomed and Dorothy Jones brought all her experience as director to a lost cause.

— ROBERT HARRIS