

THE LOVER + FAMILY VOICES

Feb 2005

Pinteresque prose

demands to be heard

Richmond Drama Awards

Joy Manners

THE staging of a play by Harold Pinter is always an event; the staging of two is doubly so. To understand the plays is not easy and their appreciation is a challenge to cast and audience.

Last week's presentation of **The Lover and Family Voices** by the Teddington Theatre Club in the Coward Room at the Hampton Hill Playhouse excelled in some respects but disappointed in others.

It has been said that the happiest couples are those who can forget they are lovers during the day and forget they are married at night. In 'The

Lover', the couple, Sarah and Richard, have been married for ten years but carry on a ritual during some afternoons when he pretends to be her illicit lover and she his mistress. In this way they strive to sustain their marriage. In the role of the husband/lover, Scott O'Brien gave a superbly polished performance. His mellifluous voice caressed the Pinter prose and his timing was impeccable. As his wife/mistress, Amanda-Jade Tyler was the perfect foil. She dressed seductively, moved gracefully, and rose above the distraction caused by a cigarette lighter which failed to function.

The production was not helped by a cramped set of elderly furniture (the play was set in the 1960s) and cheerless, black back drapes.

The second play, 'Family Voices', is a play for voices. The main character, known as Voice 1, is a rather naïve young man who has left home and has found lodgings with a strange family in what could be a brothel. He would appear to be in moral danger.

When first broadcast on BBC Radio 3 in January 1981, the part of Voice 1 was taken by Michael Kitchen. In the Teddington Theatre Club's production, Voice 1 was played by a woman, Abigail Irving. She gave a lively, articulate portrayal of the character but the change of gender meant that the sexual innuendo in the script was not realised. The relationship of an only son with his distraught, abandoned mother, Voice 2 (played with sensitivity by Annie Friend) and with his recently deceased

father, Voice 3, were also adversely affected.

The rectangular Coward Room at the Hampton Hill Playhouse had been arranged crossways, with the set which contained a bath, a large armchair and a bier for the corpse, taking up roughly one third of the length. The audience was seated in the other two thirds of the room. This did them little kindness, as the lack of racking to much of the seating meant that those not immediately close to the acting area could see very little of what was happening.

As the play was originally written for voices only, it would surely have been more sensible to present a production nearer to the original and one which the audience could more easily follow and understand.