

Faringdon Folly

It's Visiting Hour at the Corn Exchange!

HE who would true valour see, Let him come hither ... to Faringdon Com Exchange where the newly formed Faringdon Dramatic Society, against many odds, staged a performance of four short hospital plays by Richard Harris, called Visiting Hour.

Earlier this year, after a long history of ill feeling between the Community Theatre and the management of the Community Centre, the players broke away and formed the new Dramatic Society, and this was their first production since that break.

Opportunities to rehearse at the Com Exchange were confined to the last few days before the performance. There were no proper stage, no wings, no lighting gantry (only lighting 'trees'), no curtains - and to cap it all, the lighting control panel failed on the Monday before the performance. It was only restored half-way through the dress rehearsal on Wednesday. Boxes were borrowed from a school to extend the stage, though nothing could be done about its inadequate height. Only two performances of the plays, rather than the usual three, could be staged. But there was no discouragement which could make Faringdon Dramatic Society once relent its avowed intent to put on this production.

And it was all well worth the struggle, not only from the point of view of the company's morale, but also the loyal and appreciative audiences, which numbered

As she feeds him home-made soup and trifle ("You know how you like my trifle"), her questioning, and his lame excuses, gradually reveal that he was parked without lights in a farm track with a female colleague when the accident happened....

In *Show Business*, hospital politics, professional rivalry and the big egos (of both television presenters and surgeons) were explored, and there were some excellent performances from Jo Webster, Carole Tappenden, Jeni Summerfield and Debbie Lock as the main protagonists. Duncan Graham was a smooth and efficient male nurse who himself proved not averse to playing up to camera, while Roger Leitch was the long-suffering patient, Mr Darbon. Supporting roles were played by Beryl Rees, Joan Lee, Walther and Irene Schoonenberg, Kate Peer, Robert Wentworth and Peter Webster.

Star of the whole show was undoubtedly Carolyn Taylor who as Pauline in *Keeping Mum*, created a 'Talking Heads' role which even Patricia Routledge herself might have applauded. In a testing monologue, she portrayed the stresses and strains of caring for a sick elderly mother, and the love-hate relationship that that situation engenders.

And finally, in *Magic*, it was the turn of Beryl Rees, Dave Headey, Lucy Walden, Joan Lee and Peter and Jo Webster, to treat the audience to some excellent cameo

between 80 and 100 on each of the two evenings.

Producer Helen Barter, despite rumours, still had a full head of hair at the end of the week. She directed two of the playlets, while Dave Headey and Debbie Lock directed the remaining two, and managed to keep up an admirably even quality of performance throughout.

While the first and third playlets, *Plaster* and *Keeping Mum* had casts of only two, *Show Business* (cast of 14) and *Magic* (6) brought all the rest of the players onto the stage.

Plaster was an amusing interchange between a deceptively naive wife (Kate Lord) visiting her highly bandaged and plastered husband (Alistair Warner) in hospital after a road accident.

performances. Lucy Walden was a northern floozie constantly on the phone to her Barry (pronounced "Barreh") whom she suspected of having already provided himself with a substitute girlfriend while she was bedridden; Dave Headey and Beryl Rees, as Ma and Arthur, were reminiscent of Andy Capp and Flo, or of one of those old radio comedy series from the 50s, while Joan Lee was a somewhat bewildered spinster awaiting the "Big" operation, who could have done without a visit from the insensitive Ron and Joan (Peter and Jo Webster), all tarted up for a do at 'The Lodge'.

Good timing made the most of the comic lines in this playlet - and we are still chuckling over the black joke about the head in intensive care.

I.S

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