

LAST NIGHT'S
FIRST NIGHT

Oct 1959

Amphitryon
38

By JOHN LUFF

"AMPHITRYON 38," presented by the Garrison Players to the Festival of Arts at the Loke Yew Hall last night, has quite a history. It begins as a Greek myth; was turned into a comedy by Jean Giraudoux and adapted into English by the American playwright, Samuel Nathaniel Behrman.

As a Festival piece, it is ideal, it tests every department of the stage, but its audience appeal is limited to those who appreciate real theatre.

Now Giraudoux, as Anouilh, regarded the theatre as the perfect medium for expressing what he had to say about life. He did not reckon his work could be improved by this or that producer.

So we have had to wait patiently for a producer to know what he was about before we have received a good performance of one of these highbrow plays.

Giraudoux regarded the theatre as a complete entity. There had to be harmony not only between actors and sets, but between every trivium of the production.

That is why this week's production makes the Hongkong Stage Club's presentation of "Ring Round the Moon," seem so amateurish by comparison. I hate having to say that, but it is a stark naked fact.

Barbara Lawrence the producer of "Amphitryon 38" knows her job, knows just what is to be achieved. In short she understands the play. I doubt whether the people who were on the same stage last week knew what they were about.

The sets and the general design are by far the best and most imaginative ever seen on the Hongkong stage. The opening scene, a picture frame setting showing Jupiter and Mercury poised on a cloud planning a little gentle rape is artistically supreme.

The lighting of the sets, designs, the subtle use of light change, the grouping, the general deportment of the cast was finished to the nth degree.

It was the difference between knowing and posing. The former I admire, the second I despise. I hold this production to be a lesson in art.

Regarding the actors. They turn up in my mind in the following order. Most vivid is June Armstrong-Wright as Alkmene who entertained the god unaware, while he enjoyed the husband Amphitryon's privileges.

Next is June Elliott who ruffled Jupiter David Jordan's feathers when the latter tried the art of rape as a swan.

Geoffrey Lupton gave a nice performance as Sosie in Amphitryon's house and Victor Ladd, quite a droll as the silent trumpeter.

Peter Hammond was too shrill as Mercury and Raymond Fry too hesitant as Amphitryon. I think also that David Jordan should play Jupiter with a more earthy appeal. That was the Greek iconoclastic approach, the view of man's elevation above gods formed in man's image. The play proceeded as it should, well-timed, and a magnificent climax when the outwitted Jupiter is put in his place in the scene-on-the-palace-roof.

It is at once extremely amusing, but has real searing Gallic wit with the French delight of exposing idols with feet of clay.

Harmonising with this is a magnificent set, clever lighting, and slatuary which demands poses under the cleverest make-up seen on the Hongkong stage. Now comes the question. Did I enjoy the play? No! But I admired it.

For me it is too clever, too consciously clever. Its wit is reminiscent of the undergraduates' room of the early thirties. The audacity is academic, the epigrams over-polished. The theme, the destruction of idealistic-romanticism too burdened.

But not a comma will I remove from what I have said. Remembering that our theatre appreciation suffers because we get so little of it. This performance burns into the intellect. But it reaches a height far and away anything before achieved. It soars like a rocket, but disappears in a cluster of stars.

China
mail

By Garrison Players

Amphitryon 38'
Delicious Aperitif
For Happy Evening

By K. C. Harvey
Standard Drama Critic

Strength is given to this year's Festival of the Arts by the Garrison Players' laudable choice of play—Amphitryon 38, by S. N. Behrman, adapted from the French of Jean Giraudoux and produced for the Players by Barbara Lawrence.

This is a delicious aperitif that is sustained throughout for a happy evening, a three-hour presentation. Cynicism, dry wit and bursts of eloquence interspersed with restraint, are the ingredients of Jordan's role; he blends them admirably and spices them subtly with mime and meaning.

Despite an intermittent tendency to fumble first syllables of certain words, (a first-night tendency, perhaps), Peter Hammond lends credence to his Mercury and there are times when he is well resolved within the part.

Geoffrey Lupton, who has played in several local drama successes, imparts power to the role of Sosie, spokesman for Amphitryon and, in effect, steward of his master's household.

June Armstrong-Wright, another Hongkong stage stalwart, gives a strong performance as Alkmene, a portrayal that evaluates impressively the varying moods, phases and sentiments of the character.

Raymond Fry's Amphitryon is satisfying and he fits the role of the professional soldier whose tender moments, outside battle, contribute materially to the by-play.

Linda Reeves is a realistic Ninetta and Victor Ladd provides the droll touches as the Trumpeter.

Eugene Itenson is a credible Echo. Other roles are competently played by Gill Davidson, as Kleantha, June Elliott, as Leda, and by Tom Lewis, as the warrior.

The sets, professionally designed and constructed, are a joy to behold; wrtunes at colourful; lighting is well evaluated and the statuary (both live models) is finely conceived and achieved.

To sum up: This production has a professional ring. Despite first-night apprehensiveness, it will go from strength to strength during its all-too-brief run. Would that it could continue for extra nights!

Hong Kong
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China Mail August 14, 1959

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Will the Players return to the little theatre of St. George's Hall? That is the mighty question. The success of their latest production, on the greater stage area of the Loke Yew Hall, should prompt the answer.

Artistic Spice, by K. C. Harvey, appears in the Standard every Monday.

TO The Garrison Players our warm appreciation is due, for a commendable presentation of Amphitryon 38, last week, at The University. It just shows what can be done when a local drama group emerges from the confines of its little theatre and broadens artistic perspective with a production of this calibre.

The sets were the finest that have been seen for many a moon; the intriguing music was specially composed for the occasion; the production of Barbara Lawrence was as profes-



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This is a delicious aperitif for a happy evening, a fascinating tale of Jupiter's descent to earth, to woo and seduce a beautiful woman, Alkmene, wife of General Amphitryon.

In this mission, the mighty Jupiter, Lord of The Gods, is assisted in this intrusion upon the mortals, by Mercury, his winged messenger.

But when Jupiter comes upon earth and seeks to alienate the affection of Alkmene for her Amphitryon, all is not plain sailing . . .

Such is the theme of this story, which Barbara Lawrence and her players unfold with a liberal dash of skill and a generous measure of artistry.

Last night saw the opening of a three-night run, at the Loke Yew Hall of The University, and the production was well received.

Favourable Impact

First favourable impact of the play was the excellence of the opening prologue, whereby Jupiter and Mercury are astride a cloud, plotting and planning the exciting mission among the mortals.

For this scene, Producer Lawrence and artistic designer Bob Elliott conceived a well-lit cut-out, set amidst the clouds and perched realistically midway between footlights and top of proscenium. The effect is admirable.

And from that moment, David Jordan's Jupiter takes on a realism and an impact

that is sustained throughout a three-hour presentation.

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