

GARRISON PLAYERS

Friday, Feb. 13th, 1959

Presentation Of "Plaintiff In A Pretty Hat" Not Up To Expectations

LACKING IN ZEST AND SPIRIT

(By ALEC M. HARDIE)

The Garrison Players' new production involves another version of drawing-room comedy constructed on a very slender and obvious framework of a plot. Such light trifles as "Plaintiff in a Pretty Hat" need a fast zestful cast with a keen sense of enjoyment and a wide range of varied pace, sense of climax—and anti-climax. By no means an easy task for amateurs.

Last night at the King George's Hall, The Missions to Seamen, most of this spirit was lacking, and the First Act in particular dragged on it a flat slow rate. The script did not always help. The plot has few twists. A young Lord finds himself in love with a young debutante, but is already engaged to a successful Australian journalist who threatens to sue him for breach of promise. Although of an age to marry he is not able to solve this dilemma for himself and he invokes his eccentric Father's advice and help. The slighted fiancée uses her influence with the Press to make life uncomfor-

table for the young couple, and Father with Welsh "cunning" works out his plans. It was obvious how the scheme would end, and I felt we were an unconscionable time in getting there! And the slow taking up of cues added many unnecessary minutes!

Peter Hammond as the crafty Earl of Hewlyn was aware of the humour of his lines, but he pitched his voice somewhat high and could not get enough variation as a result. He did his best to bring some liveliness to the stage.

As the Plaintiff Thelma Stuart had the best voice of the evening, and suggested the confidence of her character, and she broke down well at the end to an effective "softness." Some of her moments were spoiled by unnecessary and aimless movements—a distraction shared by all the cast.

Again some dignity was lost by a tendency to slouch and round the shoulders. This was more noticeable in the only other lady in the cast whose posture was nearly always in the form of a broken 'S'.

Joie De Vivre Flattened

Altogether Diana Hooton as Lady Susan Creel flattened the *joie de vivre* of her part, and the mixture of simplicity and conscious sophistication of her age was completely absent. The calmest line of the evening was uttered by her: 'I have never been so excited in my life.' Some excitement would have helped the first Act and made us believe that she was in love.

John Lodge was somewhat disappointing after his performance in "The Man with a Load of Mischief." He lost his temper well, but his love-passages were very lacking in emotion and technique. He was hampered by a strange affected voice that gradually wore off. And his hat almost rivalled in its peculiarity the Plaintiff's!

Noel de Guingand enjoyed himself as a gamekeeper turned batman. He struggled with a Welsh accent and had he been able to acquire a lilt he would have been more effective.

So the play passes the evening but I came away feeling that I had eaten baked custard after being promised a soufflé.

The set was effective and gave a sense of space. Less furniture on the stage would have helped to make the movements easier. But generally Mrs Jean Ramage might have exerted her privilege as Producer and stuck a pin into her cast!

FEBRUARY 1959

Plaintiff In A Pretty Hat

Players' Production Packs Little Theatre Of Seamen's Missions

By K. C. Harvey
Standard Drama Critic

A play-with-a-difference and a new producer combine to give Colony playgoers a run for their money. Last night's audience thought likewise, for the play, *Plaintiff in a Pretty Hat*, by Hugh and Margaret Williams, packed the little theatre of The Missions to Seamen—a rare event for a Hongkong first night.

This is not a particularly strong play, nor is the cast an exceptional one. The production has its weaknesses, yet this Players' production was a worth-while selection.

As the title implies, it's a breach of promise affair: it could have been dull stuff had not the playwrights succeeded in interspersing some trite dialogue with stimulating side kicks.

Producer Jean Ramage had the right idea from the start. Aware of the play's limitations, she has not attempted to force the pace or overplay the characters.

Difficulty Overcome

Casting — always a tricky consideration in a community wherein talent abounds, but not always of the essential kind — presented the usual problem. In this production the difficulty has been overcome quite well, yet with the following reservations:

Diana Hooton's youthful Lady Susan Creel is a little too naive at times: I do not feel that the play calls for a young woman who is anything other than a former debutante who has emerged satisfactorily from the mould. There were times when Diana's credence and poise lapsed slightly, — and then the sincerity of her characterisation missed a beat.

And that "balloon" dress: modern, yes, but quite inconvenient for practical stagecraft — and detracting.

Noel de Guingand's man servant, Watkyn is a characterisation that has been carefully appraised and well prepared. And yet, even with two Welshmen to advise on the national language—with accent upon *accent* and the North Wales dialect—the worthy Watkyn lapses not infrequently into pure de Guingand.

John Lodge is not my impression of young Lord Plylimmon. His lines were delivered clearly and convincingly, with an effective build-up towards the climax in Act II.

Flow Of Words

I enjoyed Hammond's poise and confidence, his ready flow of words—oft-pompous, oft-pathetic — as the Earl of Hewlyn. Assessed in terms of performance, it was most creditable.

Thelma Stuart's Jennifer Wren conveyed well the moods and phases of the title role; and that pretty hat offset, attractively, a not un-pretty face. This role calls for quick changes of mood, theme and pace. I was good casting and —for the producer—a rewarding portrayal.

Off-stage, Jeremy Watson performed an amusing service, as the Cockney with the obliging barrel organ.

The set, evolved by Jean and George Ramage, with sterling assistance from the backstage team, makes commendable use of limited stage dimensions. Lighting is realistic and well timed.

The production continues tonight and tomorrow night.

GARRISON PLAYERS' SUCCESS

Feb. 13, 1959

It must have been encouraging for the Garrison Players to open their three-night run of "*Plaintiff In A Pretty Hat*", to a full house, last night.

"*Plaintiff In A Pretty Hat*", a light thing by Hugh and Margaret Williams, is certainly not a play for the long-haired or the blue-stockinged, yet it has its moments.

For instance, there is a beautiful cadence about some of the lines; a sort of musical rhythm, all about the Welsh Hills and the Wye Valley, and when delivered with an ear to their music, as they were by Noel de Guingand, they were very pleasant as a kind of verbal air.

Obviously, when a play of this kind opens with two people on the stage, and the playwright has contrived to give the above mentioned plot by both word and gesture, he calls for a pretty piece of acting.

Now heaven forbid that I discourage a promising young actress, but Diana Hooton looked too young, acted too young, and was altogether too refreshingly unsophisticated for the part.

IN LOVE

Playing opposite Diana Hooton was John Lodge, and his portrait of a young man in love was terribly chilly. The audience tried its best to titter in the right places, but it was exceedingly hard going, both on the stage and in the audience until the more mature and experienced actors entered.

Noel de Guingand appeared as Watkyn, a game keeper turned houseman. The rich lines I have mentioned; but where he scored was in the character part of the stage Welshman.

Thelma Stuart, as the cool calculating Australian career girl gave one of the performances of the season.

Peter Hammond as the Earl of Hewlyn, who states himself to be the Welshman of the Welsh has a rich part. Nevertheless, in spite of a good performance, it had not that evenness of interpretation which characterised both that of Miss Stuart and Mr de Guingand.

The set was easily the best ever placed upon the stage of King George's Hall. The lighting and the cues were perfect. Rarely has a play got off to such a good start for many seasons.

Jean Ramage, the producer, has made an excellent production with three tried players, and two of very promising material.—J. L.