

HK Culture—A Step Forward

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Staging of "The Taming of The Shrew" in the centrally-located Festival Theatre would more likely ensure a financial success . . . at the distant Loke Yew Hall . . . Ponder, therefore, one these factors.

I HAVE full admiration for the Hongkong Stage Club and for its current chairman, Noel de Guingand, who is one of the most constructive realists that the group has enjoyed; it is therefore essentially in good faith that I stress the need for pioneering, experimentation by the Stage Club, as well as from the Garrison Players. Mounting a Shakespearean play in the Festival Theatre

would have created problems; but no problem in stagecraft is unsurmountable. I am one of many supporters of live theatre who would have preferred the *al fresco* atmosphere of the Festival Theatre to the formality of the Loke Yew Hall. Remember the joy of "Midsummer Night's Dream," set in the open air, at Diocesan Boys School?

Staging Shakespeare with the considerable advantage of audience participation, would have ensured the "warming-up" of the play from the outset — a more difficult factor in the conventional auditorium. HAS any member of the Stage Club executive committee — or the producer — attended a performance of a play in Bernard Miles Mermaid Theatre, on London's Thames-side? Had this happened, I cannot believe that any progressive drama group would prefer to miss the challenging opportunity of a First Night at our waterside Festival

Theatre, here in the heart of neon-hued Hongkong — by night . . . OVER to Noel de Guingand, for the Stage Club's answer: "This is a new thing. At the time of planning for 'The Taming of The Shrew', we did not know if it would work out in a theatre of this kind. "We had made our firm booking for the Loke Yew Hall; also, the size of the cast — twenty people — would have presented a problem . . . Then there are the sets, which have to be changed ("Bad Seed" requires but one "flat" setting, throughout) . . . And there is the extraneous noise factor, of which, at the time, we knew nothing. "And we have introduced something of a novelty into the production: the cast includes some Chinese, among them David Wong 'Puck' of 'The Dream', who is playing Hortensio. "Another Chinese will play Christopher Sly — an original touch you'll agree?"

The Festival Theatre

FROM Arts Festival chairman, Aileen Dekker, comes encouraging news regarding the temporary Festival Theatre which is, in the minds of many, one of the most enterprising and successful ventures in Arts Festival planning. A recent correspondent to the daily press has advocated that this attractive little theatre, which meets an urgent community need, should be retained until such time as the City Hall is ready. It is an admirable suggestion and one that commends itself to all who enjoy art for art's sake. CHAIRMAN Dekker warmed up to the subject when I discussed with her the future of this temporary Festival Theatre. "Of course, we want to retain it. There is a very good case for its retention. Our Festival Committee is doing all possible to influence the authorities to let us retain it. "It depends, to a great extent, on the support that will be forthcoming from our various cultural groups, should it be possible for us to obtain permission to keep the theatre until the City Hall concert and theatre auditoriums are ready for public use."

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MEANWHILE, the Arts Festival Committee is doing all possible to save the Festival Theatre, for the time being. Sympathetic cooperation is forthcoming and there is every hope that it will be possible to retain, temporarily, this valuable asset to our cultural needs. For only \$300 per night, including lighting, our cultural organizations can rent the Festival Theatre. The invitation is not confined, primarily, to music and drama groups: the Festival Theatre can be hired by any reputable concern — enabling, for example, demonstrations or seminars to be given. It is because of the anti-fire safety requirements that it has not been possible for the open "basket weave" pattern of the walls to be fully insulated against sound. Since the first performance of the Garrison Players' production of "Bad Seed", structural alterations have been made to the Festival Theatre which have reduced the extraneous sounds: it is now suitable for the presentation of stage plays and performances of music by soloists or small groups—for example, a Chamber Ensemble. WHILE the future of the Festival Theatre is in the balance, there is good news that the Star Ferry pier, in which the Arts Festival is set, has a prolonged "life": it is being taken over by the SPC after Nov. 12, when the Arts Festival is concluded. Mrs. Dekker endorsed my views, commenting: "It would have enabled this Shakespearean play to have been performed in a setting that is well suited to the period of the play (Elizabethan times). "The Garrison Players were well pleased with the success of their pioneering experiment — at a cost of only \$300

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Retain The Theatre!

AFTER expressing myself strongly in favour of the retention pro-tem, of the Festival Theatre constructed for the Arts Festival, I have received from Miss Ellen Watson, the Garrison Players' honorary secretary, the following letter, which gives further support to the cause: "The Garrison Players were most interested to read your recent comments concerning the temporary Festival Theatre. Having concluded the slightly exhausting, but very interesting experience of inaugurating a brand new theatre, we feel that we can speak with some authority on its assets and problems. "When the Garrison Players chose BAD SEED to be our first play for the 1960-1 season, we decided to attempt it as an arena stage production for the experience and novelty of the method of staging. "We had planned two rehearsals, to familiarise our actors with playing area, set the lighting, rehearse with props, check make-up and costumes. "Instead, on Monday night, we had a make-shift run-through under naked bulbs strung up on an emergency line. Dress rehearsal on Tuesday was lengthy and tiring, with crews handling equipment for the first time, as the actors attempted to perfect their business. "As late as Wednesday afternoon—opening night—there were crews still being installed. Fire Brigade inspectors were closely scrutinising the premises to insure adherence to safety regulations, the stage and the theatre area were littered with labourers, tools, properties and rubble; and, due to licensing technicalities, we faced the dreary prospect of having no refreshment bar for audience patronage at the interval! "Nevertheless — through a combination perhaps of faith, luck, determination and plain hard work, by curtain time on Wednesday night the stage was set, the seats were

neatly labelled, the lights were rigged, the theatre entrance was festooned with paper lanterns and potted plants, the barmen were busily dispensing drinks to early-comers, and BAD SEED went on exactly as scheduled! "There is, indeed, the problem of extraneous noise outside the theatre. But our actors managed to cope with it, and innumerable members of the audience each night paid us the compliment of saying that they were so engrossed in our play that they failed to notice the noise. "The Garrison Players, with the prerogative of 'pioneers' would like to urge that this charming, flexible, real Hongkong theatre be retained, and used by local societies, at least until the City Hall is ready for use. "Speaking for ourselves, we should be delighted to perform in it again!" THIS letter expresses, in impressive detail, the reaction of a leading Colony drama group — a body of enthusiasts who experimented — and succeeded beyond expectation — for the Players' production of BAD SEED was Festival Fare personified. Two major points arise from Miss Watson's report: reference to the backstage area and its capacity for handling productions much larger and more complex than BAD SEED; and the drama group's delight in having a real theatre, however basic and temporary it may be, in which to stage plays. The temporary Festival Theatre should retained!

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the Standard 19, 1960

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"When the Garrison Players chose BAD SEED to be our first play for the 1960-1 season, we decided to attempt it as an arena stage production, for the experience and novelty of the method of staging.

"I T was, as you know, originally scheduled for performance at the Foreign Correspondents' Club. Rehearsals had barely begun when the Arts Festival Committee invited us to present our play in the new theatre.

"The producer and the committee weighed all considerations — among them the fact that the theatre was designed on the arena plan, which suited our needs for this play; the ease of transport and parking facilities for both players and audience; the safety of a roofed theatre in this season of uncertain weather; and the fact that the architect was most co-operative in meeting our suggestions and requests for rigging light bars, installing electrical fixtures, etc.

"Our performance dates were set for Oct. 12, 13, 14 and 15. We were assured that the theatre would be ready for us to move in for rehearsals on Oct. 8.

"I N actual fact, the structure was completed some days before that date but much remained to be done before it was really ready for an audience. We moved in our set and equipment on Oct. 9, but essential power lines were not completed until the evening of Oct. 11.

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through under naked bulbs strung up on an emergency line. Dress rehearsal on Tuesday was lengthy and tiring, with crews handling equipment for the first time, as the actors attempted to perfect their business.

"A S late as Wednesday afternoon—opening night—there were crises to hurdle—seats were still being installed, Fire Brigade inspectors were closely scrutinising the premises to insure adherence to safety regulations, the stage and the theatre area were littered with labourers, tools, properties and rubble; and, due to licencing technicalities, we faced the dreary prospect of having no refreshment bar for audience patronage at the interval!

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"D ESPITE this recital of the problems involved the Garrison Players have no regrets at having gambled on the Festival Theatre. Actors agree that the dressing room facilities are superior to those found in other halls.

"Crew members feel that the backstage area, while not large, is compact, well-designed and capable of handling productions much larger and more complex than BAD SEED.

"There is, indeed, the problem of extraneous noise outside the theatre. But our actors managed to cope with it, and innumerable members of the audiences each night paid us the compliment of say-

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"It depends, to a great extent, on the support that will be forthcoming from our various cultural groups, should it be possible for us to obtain permission to keep the theatre until the City Hall concert and theatre auditoriums are ready for public use."

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Mrs. Dekker endorsed my views, commenting: "It would have enabled this Shakespearean play to have been performed in a setting that is well suited to the period of the play (Elizabethan times).

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