

THE
VISIT
2000

RICHMOND DRAMA AWARDS

Twentieth century fable

ARARELY performed play by Friedrich Durrenmatt was given a rivetting production by Stephen Thompson for Teddington Theatre Club at the Hampton Hill Playhouse last week.

Written in 1956, *The Visit* by this Swiss playwright had a Peter Brook production in this country in 1960, but as far as I know, nothing major since then.

It comes over like a Grimm's fairy tale of the 20th Century (no, not the 21st), and tells of a witch-like, fabulously wealthy old woman, Clara, who returns to her impoverished native town and bribes the citizens to kill the man who seduced her when she was 17.

Basically decent and humane, these people resist the woman's offer, but they are in desperate poverty and the temptation is great.

Although this sounds like a grim story line, the play is enlivened by comic business and a stylised, almost balletic

interpretation with imaginative mime sinuously performed with great precision by a strong cast, clad mainly in black, faces chalky white, their eyes hollowed by dark circles.

In spite of the grotesque, macabre elements, it's essentially a comedy albeit with a tragic end.

As Anton Schill, Matthew Flexman emerges as a sympathetic character despite his youthful callousness towards Clara, and finally achieves a kind of nobility as he meets his inevitable fate.

Jan Palmer-Sayer, in an admirable portrayal as Clara, manages not to make a caricature of this fundamentally wicked woman, but imbues her with a complexity of sorrow and humour in a glitteringly charismatic performance.

There were notable performances too from Nadia Albina as The Woman and Helen Linstead as The Teacher and the other members of the cast rose to the challenge of this extremely demanding play magnificently.

Jenny Scott

HAMPTON HILL PLAYHOUSE

A veritable feast for the senses

FREDERICK Durrenmatt is best known for a brand of cynicism and tragedy relieved by dazzling inventiveness. So in this

production by the Teddington Theatre Club, look out for a range of theatrical pyrotechnics, mime and stunning invention.

In *The Visit*, which was widely acclaimed when it first appeared in 1956, the Swiss playwright paints a sour and jaundiced picture of post-war Europe, allegorised in a savage psychological drama.

The story concerns a woman's revenge on the man who seduced and then abandoned her. Claire Zachanassian, now a millionairess, returns to her home town - a crumbling and impoverished place - where she bribes the entire population.

Every man, woman and child will be rich for the rest of their lives if they agree to condemn and execute the man who wronged her. By doing so, of course, they condemn themselves and, by extension, society as a whole.

Director Stephen Thompson was nominated as best newcomer to the Edinburgh Fringe Festival in 1997. He has gathered together an interesting cast, well prepared to launch themselves into this savage, iconoclastic drama.

Jan Palmer-Sayer, who plays Claire, performs at the TTC for the first time. She is co-founder of the Shattered Windscreen Theatre Company. Matthew Flexman, who plays Schill, is a familiar face at the Richmond Shakespeare Society and Group 64 in Putney.

An ensemble of 14 actors, using a variety of bold techniques to create a setting and atmosphere, should provide a real feast for the senses!

The play takes place at the Hampton Hill Playhouse from Saturday May 6th to Saturday May 13th at 7.45pm, tickets are £8 available on 8979 9499.