

SOIXANTE
NEUF

2002



RICHMOND DRAMA AWARDS

Being upstaged by a computer?

PREMIERED last week at Hampton Hill Playhouse, *Soixante Neuf* is the intriguing title of a fascinating new play by John Timperley.

It concerns a lonely, 69 year-old retired businessman, David, who seeks female companionship. He haunts the local library and uses the promise of access to his computer as a lure.

"Come and see my etchings" becomes "Come and use my computer".

The invitation is accepted by an attractive young woman, played by Lynda Bazely, whose objective is the completion of a book started by her deceased father. The hero checks his amorous ambition when he learns of her sexual inexperience and the two enjoy a growing friendship.

The completion of the book becomes urgent when the girl finds she has a terminal illness. She, seeking sexual fulfilment, suggests they become lovers.

Enter the girl's protective, angry mother, played by Helen Smith, who cannot understand the couple's relationship and is very hurt that her daughter has kept her illness from her, yet confided

in another.

After the daughter's death the two older people achieve a better relationship and there is a hope that they will become even closer in the future.

The Coward Room at Hampton Hill Playhouse gave the required degree of intimacy to the performance and the set was both pleasing and functional.

John Timperley brought a benign presence and light touch to the male role and he was given admirable support by his two companions. Slight changes to costume added colour and interest.

The passage of time was denoted by dimming, then restoring lights; however this was done so often the continuity suffered. Excellent sound effects added polish to the production.

The story is highly original and fascinating. Perhaps the author could 'flesh out' his script and keep to a minimum the use of equipment such as computers and telephones. Their overuse did not add to the production and at times became an irritating distraction. After all, no actor worth his salt would choose to be upstaged by a computer!

JM