

TARTUFFE

1987

AMATEUR DRAMA AWARDS

Going under the top

CHRISTOPHER Hampton's modern verse translation of the Moliere classic comedy *Tartuffe* was seen last week in a well received revival at Hampton Court Theatre.

The Teddington Theatre Club cast, supplemented by new arrivals from the Green Theatre company and young actors promoted from YAT, was notable for clear articulation, vocal energy and unusual respect for the verse form. And Nick Wilson's direction kept things ticking along for just a little more than two hours.

The famous RSC production of this text had Tony Sher as Tartuffe, abandoning any pretence at charm or credibility and going completely over the top as a greedy and blatant religious fraud. But Tony O'Callaghan ('using the role as his TTC acting audition') went too quietly in the opposite direction.

In a cool, straightforward presentation of the character, his Tartuffe revealed little sense of irony beyond what was in the text... apart, that is, from eye rolling and tongue lolling, plus a false nose to complete the gargoyle effect. And there was almost none of Tartuffe's phoney religious display — no flagellation, no stigmata, no grovelling prayers.

It was also a pity that in ditching the character of Laurent, Tartuffe's vicious young acolyte, he was robbed of an essential if silent comic feed.

Wealthy dupe Orgon and his wife Elmire were attractively

played for style and character by Edward Jeffroy and Anne Low, avoiding easy caricature, particularly when matching her humorous mischief with his astonished outrage in the seduction scene, neatly staged around, on and under a huge dining table.

More nourishing comedy came in the first act with the love scene between Lesley Hann's winsome daughter and the robust suitor of David Hannigan. Their tiffs and troubled reconciliations were exquisitely manipulated by Shelley Beard's pretty servant Dorine. And in a memorable performance, she also provided some delicious comic exchanges with Orgon and Tartuffe.

Among a well rehearsed cast Graham Holliday spoke well as the dull dog Cleane, Chris Ivey was a hot tempered Damis, and the evening started on a strong note with Cynthia Carss as the censorious Madame Pernelle making her noisy departure for Paris.

Clive Stott's set used the whole extent of the Hampton Court stage: a Louis Quatorze interior sketched on side and back walls, with almost half the acting space occupied by furniture... the outside table was provided solely for Elmire's seduction, sadly, not for a family meal. If the lighting designed by Jean Goodwin was atmospheric, it was also distracting when used to imitate the effect of flickering candelabra.

The production was entered for our Amateur Drama Awards.

John Thaxter