

Swiss experiments with the experimental theatre

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SWISS EXPERIMENTS WITH THE EXPERIMENTAL THEATRE

Zurich's neat little Theater am Hechtplatz has recently reopened under new management — that of a young producer, Mr. Georg Müller — as a *Werkbühne*, or theatre workshop. When this market place building was adapted at the city's expense some three years ago one of the main objectives was to provide a studio theatre for the Schauspielhaus company. But the far too narrow strip of stage, though used ingeniously, proved quite unsuitable for plays like Eliot's *Elder Statesman* or Ionesco's *Rhinoceros*, which were among those presented during what can hardly have been a very profitable venture.

The new management has begun by offering a double bill. The first piece, by Tancred Dorst, is called *Grosse Schmähere an der Stadtmauer* and was originally produced in Lübeck 18 months ago. In it a Chinese war widow hurls invective at the Emperor's wall which has separated her from her man; and for this the solid barrier of masonry that stands between the thin ribbon of stage and the street running behind the theatre is virtually all that is needed in the way of scenery. The Emperor orders that if she can pick out her husband from among the troops parading the ramparts she can have him back. From where she stands the soldiers all look very much alike, but she makes her choice and then has to prove that she has chosen correctly.

ORIENTAL MIME

In fact her husband is dead, but she believes that the Emperor, having taken her man, owes her a man; and so

she does all she can to make the half-hearted trooper she has picked out as a partner play up to her during the test that follows. In this the pair of them have to describe their courtship and married life together — a charade involving a good deal of oriental mime in the manner of *Lady Precious Stream*, with the two officers who are the judges playing the roles of any third parties that crop up in the love story of the young couple. It is a carefully prepared and polished performance with Miss Edith Teichmann playing the lead.

Der Abstecher, by another young German playwright, Martin Walser, is more in the nature of a cabaret sketch; but, as in *Grosse Schmähere an der Stadtmauer*, it is built round a cat-and-mouse game in which the mouse has to do a lot of explaining. In this case an engine driver returns home unexpectedly to find a company director there with his wife. The intruder has to do his explaining under the threat of electrocution with his feet in a bathtub and the naked wire from a power plug held under his nose by his questioner. *Der Abstecher* is too long-winded for what it has to say, though the conversations between the company director and his chauffeur provide the triangular main theme with an entertaining prologue and epilogue. The part of the director is played by Mr. Adolph Spalinger, who has produced both pieces.

LEFT BANK ATMOSPHERE

Small though the Theater am Hechtplatz is, it does not appear to be drawing full houses. There is, perhaps,

something too ready-made about the atmosphere, which seems to be provided in a hygienic container like instant coffee or processed cheese, though the overcrowding in the foyer during the interval makes one think of sardines. There is also competition from a newly opened *Keller-theater*, where Miss Maria von Ostfelden is offering Fernand Berset's *Le Pont des Gentils* and Edward Albee's *Zoo Story*; and here the atmosphere is more that of the *rive gauche*. This *Studio im Keller* in the Spiegelgasse is stealing the thunder of the Theater am Hechtplatz partly because, not being an approved theatre "for sanitary reasons" it is not allowed to buy advertising space, and this ban has resulted in a lot of free and unsolicited publicity of a kind calculated to attract just the kind of enthusiastic off-beat audience that is needed to give life to an experimental theatre.

(By courtesy, "The Times", 21st February 1963.)

SWITZERLAND REMEMBERS THE SICK

On the first Sunday in March, Switzerland remembers the sick. This year the special remembrance day fell on 3rd March. Federal Councillor Von Moos, Vice-President of the Confederation, appealed to the population over the radio. Whilst appreciating the splendid work doctors and nurses were doing, he considered that much more could be done and many more nurses were needed. The Federal Councillor also had some encouraging words for the sick. What they needed most, he said, was love.

A special appeal was issued by the working committee of the "Day of the Sick". It was written by the well-known author, Maurice Zermatten, and signed by the President, Prof. Dr. med. O.Gsell, Director of the Medical Clinic at the University of Basle. Many well-known public personalities from Church and politics supported it. This appeal did not ask for any specific help, but simply to remember the sick and their suffering, as well as the unselfish work done by the doctors and nurses. When we are well we are apt to push the thought of sickness away, but as soon as illness strikes us we realise that health is the most precious property. I am not one in favour of special days on which we remember our mother, our father or the blind or the lame or anybody else and then forget about them for the rest of the year. Remembering those less fortunate than ourselves should be part of our lives. But, alas, we are too busy and we get involved in too many activities, and so, perhaps, a special day of remembrance once a year may be better than no remembering at all.

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