THE CALIFORNIA SUITE 1986

Suite star

Star of the evening is Philip Sinclair's sumptuous creation of the two hotel rooms which make up the California suite at the Beverly Hills Hotel in LA. Complete with the masses of literature that greet guests, and no doubt with a Gideon bible tucked in the beside cabinet, we see both the lounge and bedroom, with the luxury bathroom glimpsed through a mirrored door. Outside the corner window, tall palms offer little shade.

Within these walls a particularly welcome guest is Kate O'Byrne, making her first Hampton Court Theatre appearance since Stevie, as a Newsweek editor fighting for custody of her seventeen year old daughter. This scene, the first of a quartet, pits East Coast against West Coast with Naill Trimble as the sensitive Californian ex-husband. Comedy and tradegy hover behind the brittle dialogue.

Next Jill Schaverein gives a beautifully observed performance as a distraught Jewish lady from Philadelphia catching her whey faced husband (John Roth) in the suite with a comatosed hooker (Jan Hickson).

In the third play Chris Byre is strongly cast in the Maggie Smith role of an English actress in LA to collect an Academy Award, with elegant support by Phil Rayner as the bisexual husband.

For the original Broadway production the idea of the fourth play was to bring together the four actors from the other scenes for one swift, farcical jolly to send audiences out laughing, into the night. But played in isolation it seems insubstantial and out of character with the rest of the evening and could be cut with advantage. Nevertheless Doug Andrews, Sue Bell, Mart Stonelake and Hazel Wyld do their best as squabbling vactioners from Chicago.

The production, which continues until tomorrow evening, has been entered for the Amateur Drama Awards.

John Thaxter