As you light it

IN A programme note for this week's Teddington Theatre Club presentation of **As you Like It,** director John Roth promises a 'two hours traffic of our stage.'

Hampton Court Theatre audiences are being pleasurably detained a little beyond two hours. But thankfully this is not an example of "director's Shakespeare" and so we escape the time wasting conflations of some recent professional versions.

The text is respected: I cannot previously remember hearing Rosalind's epilogue. And the excisions (Touchstone's tedious 'lie direct' speech for one) are painlessly made — William's 'five and twenty' goes up by a decade to suit the actor's own age.

But there is one major directorial touch: as the programme tells us, the time is the 18th Century, and knee breeches here replace the textual doublet and hose. The play gains in several directions. Philip Hickson's Jaques has the style and melancholy wit of a progenitor of the Age of Reason. Phoebe the shepherdess, as played by Jenny Laughlin, is a Dresden figure. The attendant Lords have graceful courtly business — including a fine debut performance by Kate Garman in the castrati role of Le Beau.

Best of all there is a delightful Watteauesque stage picture in the Forest of Arden (appropriately enough, actually the Ardennes) lit by flickering flame and moonlight as Peter Slaters' Orlando first joins the brotherhood of the forest, as Amiens waits to sing, and Jacques tells us that All the World's a Stage. Superb lighting by Damien Lazell, makes it a perfect moment to end Act One.

John Thaxter

AS YOU LIKE IT 1985

Ardour in Arden

THE Forest of Arden comes to Hampton Court at the end of June, when the Teddington Theatre Club presents "As You Like It" for eight performances from Saturday June 29th to Saturday July 6th, 1985, at their Hampton Court Theatre (behind the Green).

It is an idyllic setting for this 'pastoral' play, which the director John Roth has up-dated to the 18th century, using incidental music by J.S. Bach (but retaining the familiar Thomas Arne settings for the songs).

The large cast of twenty-two is led by Peter Slater as Orlando and Pamela Figaro as Rosalind (her first appearance in a T.T.C. major production).

Theirs is the principal romance, but against the love motif of Shakespeare provides dramatic counterpoint in the cynicism of the melancholy Jaques (played by Philip Hickson) and the bitter wit of the clown Touchstone (played by Michael Norman).

Jill Holliday takes the part of Celia and Roger Smith plays the exiled Duke who sees "good in everything".

The Teddington Theatre Club, formed nearly 50 years ago for the presentation of Shakespeare, invite readers to join them "under the greenwood tree" for this production of one of his most popular plays. Performances commence at 7.45 pm; tickets are £2, available to members, and the Box office opens on the 17th June. (Telephone: Box Office 01-979-6396; Membership 01-943-3322).

Roth's high comedy

"I DON'T normally approve of mucking about with Shakespeare, but in this case the Eighteenth Century seems such a perfect fit to the play".

Director John Roth was talking about his produciton of **As You Like It** for the Teddington Theatre Club, which opens tomorrow evening at Hampton Court Theatre for a run of eight performances.

"With the contrast between the conventions of the court and the freedom of the forest, it's a beautiful high comedy in the Eighteenth Century style. . . and to be perfectly honest" he says, lowering his voice, "The TTC wardrobe has got an awful lot of suitable costumes — and I never did like the look of amateur actors in doublet and hose".

Twenty four years on the amateur circuit and still barely 40, John can lay claim to be the busiest thesp in the district. It seems that few local productions emerge without a little touch of Roth in the cast, or backstage as sound technician or dirctor. Had he ever thought of turning professional?

"I'd love to — I've always had an ambition in that direction; but it's a case of screwing up your courage and screwing down the pennies before taking the leap. And I'm afraid I've enjoyed the advantages of a steady job with the huge satisfaction of being involved with first class amateur theatre".

He first trod the boards with the Arts Club in Richmond, a company still surviving as Q2 for whom he undertakes the occasional role. "I love to keep in touch with Q2 — so many of my friends are with that company — and I also joined Teddinton Theatre Club in 1973".

"I first went to the Old Hamptonians to help out and stayed on to direct Time and Time Again — my favourite show to date — and then Absent Friends. . . I had to take over the leading role at the last minute: luckily I knew all the words".

Which did he prefer, acting or directing? "Oh, there's no doubt: acting takes number one every time. But it's also great fun to direct — I've really enjoyed working on As You Like It, and I have a super cast who've worked very hard. But as director, there's a tiny bit in me that wants to play all the parts — I have to resist the temptation".

John Thaxter