1-3 May 1952

LADY PRECIOUS STREAM

EXPERT WORK BY THEATRE CLUB

SKILLED PRODUCTION, FINE ACTING

Teddington Theatre Club's production of S. I. Hsiung's whimsical Chinese-style comedy, "Lady Precious Stream," at Ronayne Hall, Hampton Wick, on Thursday last week was undoubtedly the most expert and impressive this club has staged in the past three years. Only in the merest and most trivial details did it fall from a remarkable standard —a standard set consciously high, and reached chiefly through Mrs. Frances Whitton's unhaltingly skilled production and Mr. Philip Cook's magnificent decor.

This play demands style and sophistication: much of its gentle joy derives from the punctilious observation of alien and absurd formality, and the rest from the very delicate and restrained characterisation of its protagonists. In no case did the seven persons most actively concerned in the plot fall from a high level of graciousness and that ever so slightly parodied politeness necessary to the play's best presentation.

The conventions of Chinese drama require that there shall be no scenery and only the minimum of furniture; also that this furniture shall be put to its many uses by property men (dressed, to represent invisibility, in black). No opportunities here, one would have thought, for much in the way of scenic virtuosity; but quite wrongly, for Mr. Cook's mistily painted backcloth set a mood, the side panels and columns in front of the proscenium bringing it with beautifully calculated precision, right into the audience, which was of the utmost value to the production's success. The costumes, resplendent whether Oriental or an Oriental impression of Western, played their parts, too.

Of the rightness and lightness of touch of Miss Maisie Sharp as the lady of the title there can be no question, and whether conveying a formally stifled grief or a gaily restrained sense of fun, she was charming. Mr. Anthony Eva's gardener-king was by far the best work this actor has done with the club and displayed a mature feeling for comedy which augurs well for the future, as well as getting the best out of this present role.

Mrs. Chloe Crabbe's Madam Wang was yet another startlingly stylish performance and, if Mr. T. Gwynne Edwards' playing of the Prime Minister betrayed the use of a number of familiar tricks, they did at any rate come off this time.

A word should be said in praise of Miss Beryl Madley's dulcet-toned Honourable Reader: of Mr. Dick Jacques' blunt, and Mr. Trevor Owen's bombastic, general; of Miss Betty Wadsworth's prim, and Mrs. Eileen Johnston's prattling, wives; of Messrs. Harry Lock's and Dick Penn's versatility; and most certainly of the stolid solemnity with which Miss Iris Mansfield and Mr. C. O. M. Johnston, as property men, ministered to the cast's every need.

AMATEUR THEATRE

TEDDINGTON CLUB'S DELIGHTFUL PLAY IN THE CHINESE STYLE

TEDDINGTON Theatre Club's silver jubilee season reached a triumphant climax last week in "Lady Precious Stream" at Ronayne Hall. What a delight is this quaint Chinese play! And how brilliantly did Frances Whitton interpret its delights!

She had adhered strictly to the old traditional Chinese style in which the play was written, with the two property men remaining on the stage throughout, even during the interval, and the "honourable reader" explaining the action before each scene. There was a certain amount of scenery, even though the "honourable reader" told us that the Chinese would not know what it was. It was designed by Phil Cook with his usual imagination, cut-outs of trees showing up very effectively against a white background.

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MOST welcome of the individual performances was Anthony Eva's Hsieh Ping-Kuei, the gardener who marries Precious Stream and becomes king of the Western Regions. It was his first big part and he carried it through most successfully. Maisie Sharp was a sparkling Precious Stream, and T. Gwynne Edwards was superb as her father, the Prime Minister, whom she so boldly outwits.

Chloe Crabbe, as the Prime Minister's wife, Betty Wadsworth and Eileen Johnston as their elder daughters, and Dick Jacques and Trevor Owen as the sons-in-law, were all excellent. Vera Drew gave a glorious study in regal imperiousness as the Princess of the Western Regions, and Ernest Woods deserves a special commendation as the A.D.C. who leads the princess's army in pursuit of Hsieh Ping-Kuei, becoming ever wearier at each successive mountain pass.

Harry Lock came into his own as the warden who, by divesting himself of his beard, is able to appear as warden of both the first two passes, and Richard Penn was amusing as the ancient keeper of the frontier pass.

Beryl Madley was an admirable choice for "honourable reader," with her beautifully modulated diction and subtle way of pointing the humour.

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