

for more enterprising playwrights. 24 new works were entered, of which nine reached the final. A commendable proportion, demonstrating not only higher standards but the greater readiness of new writers to venture original material. The plays selected showed a far healthier trend generally, and included the rarely seen *Dog in a Manger* by the sixteenth-century Spanish playwright Lope de Vega and an astute choice of Brian Friel's *Faith Healer*. Both suitable challenges to a student company. Perhaps most gratifying of all was the absence of such Festival warhorses as Pinter and Ionesco, who had been given a rest until Edinburgh.

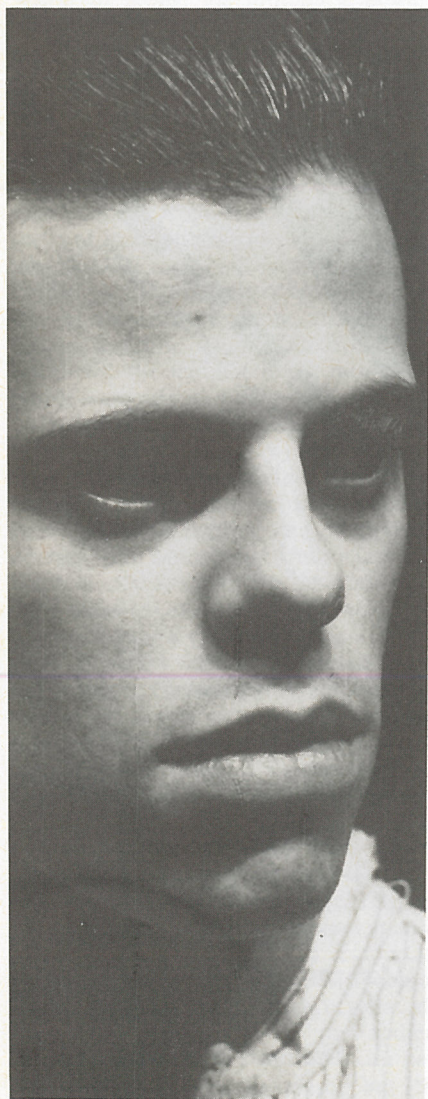
The productions which remain etched on the memory are all very different, and yet all share an aggressive direction and commitment which make them stand out above

the rest. Undoubtedly the most promising new work came from Bristol in the shape of *Small Beginnings* by Jeremy Brock, which won for its author the Sunday Times Playscript award. A typical 'Warehouse' Play, it dealt subtly and humorously with the dilemmas of a group of urban youths. Its leading actor Cyril Nri gave a remarkable performance, at once athletic and still, which made him a deserved Best Actor. It was the strength of Simon Curtis' direction, however, which finally made *Small Beginnings* such a strong play and an achievement which few companies emulated. *Happy Jack* from Minsthorpe High School was altogether quieter and less immediately impressive. Written by John Godber (author of the 1981 award winning *Cramp*) it traced a Yorkshire marriage from courtship to retirement with a sensitivity to

detail and painful silence which was assured and masterly. Firmly in the mould of 'made for TV' plays it was the best groomed and most professional piece of the week.

*Faith Healer* from Hull University was a fine choice of play and produced consistently fine performances. An intricate jigsaw of related monologues, it pieced itself together with chilling compulsion. Eileen Ryan as the faith healer's wife gave a consummate performance as an ageing neurotic and was deservedly awarded the prize for Best Actress. The distinction of *Faith Healer* was the way in which the whole complicated story was given life by the power of acting alone. Mick Cahill as the faith healer and John Goodfellow as his manager also made indelible impressions.

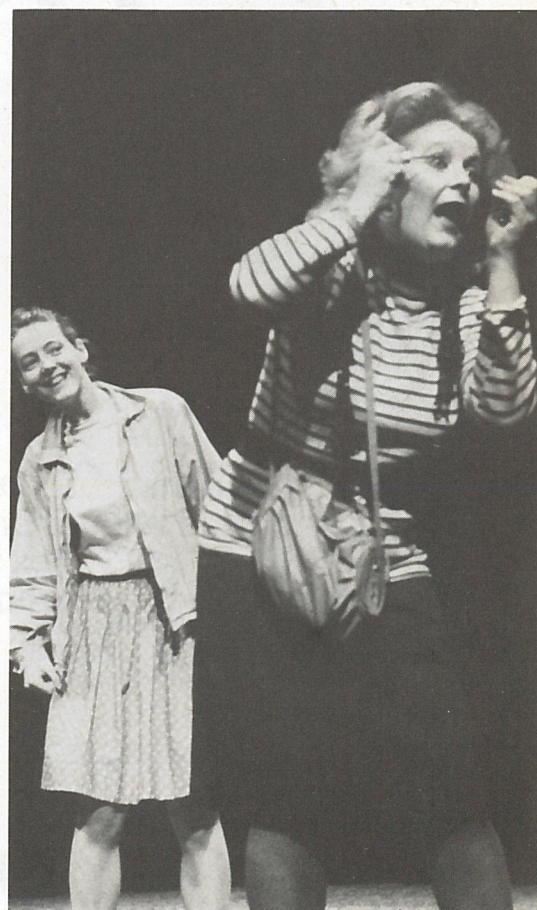
Probably the strongest company to appear in the Festival were Manchester Umbrella, who gave us *Dog in a Manger* and two new plays. They produced a constantly high standard of acting and directing and a refreshingly new approach to each play. The invited guest company from Belgium: Studio Herman Teirlinck also expressed a strong company unity and demonstrated



David Allman in *A World of Stone*



UEA's *The Seagull*



Denise Evans and Tracy Williams in *Brenda*