

THE WATERMILL THEATRE

by The Editor



IF that well known character the Average Man was asked, "Which theatre adjoins an old country house, is situated in a beautiful part of the South of England, has highly civilised wining and dining as well as the opportunity for al fresco picnics among similarly minded enthusiasts in a superb setting?" I suppose he would immediately reply "Glyndebourne"! If he was a rampant Mozartian this affirmation would probably be accompanied by an upward roll of the eyes and an orgasmic shudder.

Well, another contender has entered the lists — and this contender, the Watermill Theatre at Bagnor, near Newbury can answer a very definite 'Yes' to all the questions posed.

However, the main fare it is offering to the good folk of Berks, Oxon, Hants and Wilts — and even escaped West Enders, is drama. Note the small 'd'. Their fare is drama for entertainment, not Drama for doing good to anyone — except in so far as being well fed, intellectually stimulated and regaled in between by birdsong and the rippling

Above: Interior of the Watermill Theatre.

of a melodious stream can be considered 'do gooding'.

The Watermill was originally founded, by the conversion of an old water mill into a theatre, by the inspiration and perspiration of Mr David Gollins and the patience of his mother!

The theatre's first professional season was in 1967, and a summer season has brought the pleasures of drama to this most bucolic of shires every year since.

A few months ago the Watermill was taken over by James and Jill Sargent who are now the joint management. These two completely 'theatre' people have, between them, experience of touring drama and opera, the Royal Shakespeare Company, Liverpool Rep, the Cambridge Theatre Company and have, together, catered for the gourmets of East Anglia. But man lives not by bread alone — hence the new interest. The duo's writ runs from the selection of plays, through the engagement of actors — who, incidentally for the season "live in" in clean, comfort-

Exterior of the Watermill Theatre showing the glass walled theatre foyer.



James and Jill Sargent.

table quarters 'over the shop', to the decisions on the menus and to the stocking of the ample cellar.

Your Editor visited this delightful couple shortly after the end of their first Christmas season.

One approaches up a short gravelled drive to find a group of 1820'ish brick buildings consisting of the former mill, now the auditorium, its new foyer, which is of glass set in a timber framing to allow the audience to enjoy the views of the garden and of the River Lambourn, the delightful house, occupied by the Sargants and their two cats, and the restaurant.

The auditorium is formed from the old mill building itself, with part of the first floor cut away to form stalls and a balcony which extends forward to the proscenium with one row of seats, giving a typically 'Georgian' theatre shape. 179 people can be seated.

Your Editor's somewhat jaundiced view of rep. programming was expressed to the Sargants thus:

Editor "I suppose you are having the usual programme of any new theatre — a production of some little known Euripides which no one comes to see, quickly followed by 'Murder at the Vicarage'?"

James, riposting in a similar vein "What a pity we didn't have your advice before fixing our programme — actually we are only doing 'Duet for

One', 'Stagestruck', 'The Killing of Sister George', 'Outside Edge' plus a production of 'Twelfth Night'!"

Editor — somewhat chastened — "Lovely view from your office window James!"

The theatre will also be open on Sundays for the odd musical event. I am notably non musical but am told the offerings will be lively and diverse.

Now for the lighting. My interest here, if the Sargent's will forgive me, was somewhat antiquarian!

There are half a dozen Patt.76's. Older readers i.e. those over 50, may remember these were known as 'Acting Area' lanterns. They are shaped like large amphorae, with the end missing to allow the light to fall straight down from above.

There are the inevitable 23's — only superceded by Preludes late last year — and a goodly clutch of 123's.

These latter were being very expertly re-wired by the resident technical staff, which consists of Clare Lindsay, the Production Manager and David Newcombe, the Technical D.S.M. for the season.

Control is by a small portable desk of non Strand manufacture currently on the replacement list.

The lighting in the restaurant is definitely uncontrolled, but is subtle and flattering for it is by real candles, no less!

Below: The approach to the Watermill box office entrance. Could there be a nicer way to go to the theatre on a summer's evening?

