

and John Leonard (whose review of the facilities and felicities of the Collegiate Theatre, where the final judging of the eleven most worthy productions will take place, will be found on page 12).

A good idea, some time back now, was a Playwrights' Forum to which original scripts were submitted. This led to a circulation of ideas for production among student bodies which were potential entrants. From this it emerged, for example, that the School of Oriental and African Studies chose a play by the American writer, David Gilbert, who is coming over from California to help SOAS with its production. Which is just how forums should work.

Currently members of the companies at the Riverside Studios, the Young Vic, and the Royal Court are out and about the fringes of London, working with the Festival committee at the sensitive business of selecting the eleven productions to be staged during the Festival fortnight. Final adjudication will be by Clare Colvin of 'The Evening News' (co-sponsors of the Festival with CUE, Thames Television, and the Borough of Camden), Peter Hepple of 'Stage and Television Today', the playwright Edward Bond, and John Ashford of the ICA (where Thames TV, as their award, will offer a week's run of any play judged 'outstandingly original'). The Evening News award is for 'the most promising playwright'. CUE is giving two awards (John Ashford will be the judge), one for lighting, one for design.

Readers of this CUE are all too late now to don false beards and bogus jeans and enter old mock-Pinero scripts they've been keeping in their bottom drawers. If you've any queries don't ring us but the nice people on the Festival Committee on 01-580 9551. And you're *not* too late to be the good audience at the Collegiate this interesting project deserves.

### Helmets and Hose

After the hurly-burly, hullabaloo and brouhaha of the Cisco scene, the cellars under the Old Fire Station in Oxford induce a comforting feeling that the theatre is not, in fact, changing at all. Down there, in a splendid subterranean warren of passages, locker-rooms and even (those firemen *did* enjoy themselves) a shooting-gallery, Betty and Sheila Robbins conduct their hire business for theatrical costume and fancy dress with a knowledge, ingenuity and panache that has made them a 'by appointment only' service (Watch out both Bermans and Nathans).

They not only hire costumes ('back to about 500 BC or up to about 1950 AD'), they house costumes (typically for The Actors' Company since they lost their permanent home in Wimbledon), and they make costumes (as for Oxford's Centre for Mediaeval and Renaissance Studies). Above all, as Betty Robbins says, they really love clothes, both for their aesthetic qualities and for the important record of

the past they provide.

It doesn't matter to them whether that past is a real one or a theatrical one, so that, hanging side by side in what used to be the fireman's washroom, one might meet both your great grandmother's wedding dress and the dress worn by Celia Johnson or Barbara Jefford in that play you liked so much. Which somehow is also comforting at a time when so many costumes, as for example those for historical series on television, are found on close inspection to be simply sackcloth and sashes.

Betty Robbins, who insists she came into the business by an accident in which the late Roger Livesey and the early Iain Macintosh were somehow involved, would like to spend more time on the academic implications of clothes and costumes, perhaps curating a collection. But meanwhile, with amateur theatre at least becoming more and more ambitious in its productions and seeking, perhaps, the splendid assurance provided by authenticity in costume, Betty and Sheila Robbins are perfectly happy to stitch away and press away as all good wardrobe mistresses always did.

'You can say, if you like,' Mrs Robbins said, 'that if people come here to find a costume, the one thing they won't get is the smell of old clothes'.

### Burnt Porridge?

Lighting designers make some interesting discoveries.

We are indebted to John Simpson of White Light for a report on a visit he had to make (in a professional capacity we hurriedly add) to one of H.M. Prisons. 'Come along,' the governor said, 'and give us a hand with the lighting for a play the chaps are putting on. Does them a power of good to be involved in something creative. . . .'

Cautiously cat-walking about, prior to rehearsal, above the neat and functional stage, John Simpson began to get more interested in the system of fixed lights and follow-spots he found. Looking at the wiring, he began to wonder how long it would function before something very nasty indeed started happening. . . .

'The fit-up for your stage,' he asked the prison-officer assigned to help him, 'who did it?' 'Ah,' the officer said, 'that'll be 167 Higgins. Good steady man. No trouble. Used to be connected with the theatre business himself. Pretty professional job he does, doesn't he?'

'He certainly does. But . . . if it's not a rude question . . . could I ask what he's in here for?'

'Let me see,' the officer said. 'Oh yes, I remember. He's doing five years for arson.'

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