

THEATRE IN THE ROUND

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“Missing Bodies” and “Alas, Poor Fred”

by *K. A. Eaton*

The Studio Theatre Company Limited, assisted by the Arts Council, was formed to experiment with theatre in the round, to present new plays and encourage young playwrights and to take drama to theatreless towns. The Company hopes to foster so keen a desire for theatre in the round that local authorities will respond to the pressure exercised upon them by enthusiastic townfolk and will build permanent theatres specially adapted for this form of presentation.

In Southampton they adapted the Chantry Hall so well that we forgot how essentially rectangular it is. Well built, folding rostrums gave us an auditorium area reminiscent in structure of the Central Hall, but the seating capacity of 250 with an acting area covered by rose coloured carpet provided that intimate atmosphere which is essential to this form of dramatic presentation.

Friendliness seems to be the special hallmark of this Company and we were met on entering the hall with offers of hot coffee and cakes. There was never any doubt at all about the willing co-operation between audience and players, but in a presentation where the audience is all lined up for your interested inspection long before the actors appear, I could not fail to notice that, had the representatives of the University, the Theatre Guild and the teaching profession been compelled to leave, the hall would have been remarkably empty. To make a fair judgment of the success of this presentation one must remember that a coterie audience bears little resemblance to the crowds that flock to see *Cinderella on Ice*—another form of theatre in the round. Moreover the crusading spirit, while very laudable, is rather off-putting to youngsters who just want an evening's fun.

The Saturday evening show consisted of two one-act plays, *Memento Mori* by David Campion who played the part of the old man against Barry Boys' young man, and *Alas, Poor Fred* by James Saunders, where the players were a husband and wife with a “past”. In the first play we had no scenery or props at all; the ruined house, its crumbling walls, neglected garden and self-locking cupboards were all figments of our imaginations as the two husbands sought a last resting place for the latest wife now permanently “gone away”. The miming was excellent. I should like to have conducted a questionnaire to know how successful it was with an audience brought up on plays set against a background of realistic scenery. The second play was staged in a far more conventional manner in the sitting room of Mr. and Mrs. Pringle. It was played at an incredibly slow pace and this technique was very successful; I doubt if it would have been possible behind a proscenium arch, but sitting with them in the intimacy of their private room, the humour of the situations unfolded with a lingering depth which the audience thoroughly enjoyed.