

THE HIRED  
MAN  
1997

**RICHMOND DRAMA AWARDS**

## Not so ordinary life

**P**UBLIC taste in the 80s veered towards the more spectacular shows of Andrew Lloyd Webber, so in 1984 when *The Hired Man* finally came to London's West End, despite critical acclaim, it closed after 164 performances.

Still, the amdram circuit has benefitted. Last week a memorable production by Richard Eliot for Teddington Theatre Club, musically directed by Simon Lane, went to prove the show a valuable contribution to British musical theatre.

Initially criticised in its original version for being preachy on the subject of rural poverty, its final incarnation concentrated on the characters, and through their situations emerges the harshness of the ordinary working man's life at the turn of the century in Cumbria.

It sounds grim, but has moments of humour and great tenderness to lighten the story of John Tallentire, the hired man of the title, his wife Emily, his brothers, family, friends and fellow workers from 1898 - 1922. With Goodall's abrasive score entirely in keeping with the subject, the great strength of the piece lies in being unsentimentally told.

As Emily, Kim Allen convincingly developed her character as she grows from vivacious, devoted young wife, to loving another man, then realisation of her husband's sterling worth. It was a credible, and at times,

intensely moving performance, musically and dramatically.

An equally fine performance of great dignity came from Jon Scarrott as her husband, John, particularly poignant in 'What Would You Say to Your Son'.

His brothers were also given excellent characterisations with Pete Campbell's Seth as a militantly unionist miner and Tony Green as the engaging, irrepressible gambling man, Isaac, determined to live life to the full.

But this was an extremely powerful production in every respect, simply staged yet with great impact in the gritty, hard-edged score, sung and played with great assurance by a strong cast of singers and musicians.

Jenny Scott

**TEDDINGTON  
THEATRE CLUB**

## History cavalcade

**T**EDDINGTON Theatre Club at its temporary venue, The Vera Fletcher Hall, Embercourt Road, Thames Ditton, presents, for its autumn production, the rarely performed musical *The Hired Man* by Melvyn Bragg and Howard Goodall.

Based on Melvyn Bragg's stirring novel of Cumbrian rural life, set in the early years of this century, it tells the story of one family's journey - Bragg's grandparents - from land labourers to colliers and back to the land. The background of working-class ritual includes whippet racing, hiring fairs, hunting, drinking bouts, union meetings, etc.

This musical brings alive that cavalcade of our history which swept us into this century and on to 'a war to end wars' and it has a great score.

With the direction in the hands of Richard Eliot, the music supervised by Simon Lane and with a cast including the best and most experienced of Theatre Club's singers, each performance promises a fine evening's entertainment.

The opening performance is on Wednesday, October 22nd and continues each evening at 7.45pm until Saturday October 25th.

## Bragg remembers dark satanic mills

**T**HE mills are alive with the sound of music in Melvyn Bragg's *The Hired Man*, which in Teddington Theatre Club's latest production, which opens at the Vera Fletcher Hall, in Thames Ditton, next week.

Based on Bragg's novel of the same name, the musical is set in the rural and industrial communities of Cumbria.

*The Hired Man* follows the grim life of Bragg's grandfather who lost a wife to tuberculosis and a son to the trenches of World War I.

Director Richard Eliot, of

the TTC, said: "A huge amount of emotion comes through with the music. It is very simply scored and it is powerful music."

The production is accompanied by piano, drums and a trumpet, he said.

Eliot added: "In a strange way it is a celebration of the unbreakable spirit, that it doesn't matter how bad it gets he just keeps going. There are all sorts of political overtones."

*The Hired Man* opens on Wednesday and runs to Saturday, October 25.