

LEAVE IT
TO PSMITH

1992



Plum performance

FINAL entry in this season's drama awards is Paul Lawrance's affectionate revival of *Leave it to Psmith*, a three act comedy by Ian Hay and PG Wodehouse that first opened in the West End in September 1930, ran for a creditable 149 performances and then was never heard of again - until this week.

Detailed notes in the TTC programme, a model of their kind, suggest that the director is an ardent member of the PG Wodehouse fan club. But for the record his production departs in several particulars from Plum's original script, notably turning The Earl of Middlewick into the 8th Earl of Emsworth, and the splendidly named Morpheus Club into the improbable 'Senior Conservative'.

At the Sunday evening performance laughs seemed slow to come until the emergence, first of Edward Jeoffroy as a lugubrious lift attendant at Green Park station, and then, wonder of wonders, of David Hannigan as the monocled hero of the title.

Leaning five degrees back and lightening his natural baritone to the silly-ass drawl of a Thirties comedy, he gave an enchanting performance in a debonair style almost vanished from

today's stage. With period acting of this quality, the whole Ralph Lynn canon of upper class twits and comen could, for what it's worth, become his oyster.

The plot, a country-house jewel robbery, is impossible to summarise. But the production enjoys excellent performances by Kenneth Mason as the myopic peer, Karim Peermohamed as the irrepressible Freddie, Helen Smith as his sumptuous aunt, Carolyn Williams as romantic heroine Eve, Allen Dickens sneezing as the secretary, Cynthia Carss as a fading society dame and Roger Smith and Clare Terry as a couple of thwarted hoodlums.

But the cast of sixteen is considerably outnumbered by the production team headed by Mr Lawrance as director and by Ian Donaldson as the resourceful designer. His neat solution to a play demanding four different settings is the use of classical periaktoi, twin scenic components each with three different faces, wheeled into view. Watching the elaborate scene changes is all part of the evening's fun.

Six ladies who share responsibility for the wardrobe have provided excellent period costumes.

John Thaxter