

WATERS OF THE MOON 1985

THEATRE

Thatcherian drama

ACCLAIMED as Chekhovian when first produced as London theatre's contribution to the Festival of Britain, *Waters of the Moon* has failed to live up to that reputation — until this week's atmospheric revival at Hampton Court Theatre.

Peter Slater's loving and lavish Teddington Theatre Club production of Norman Hunter's snowbound drama effortlessly recalls the stultifying early Fifties when Britain was busy losing the peace after struggling through six years of war.

In a shabby but genteel hotel on the edge of Dartmoor half a dozen sad inmates sit and wait for death.

But their quite preoccupations as the New Year approaches are shattered by the sudden arrival of Helen Lancaster and her husband and daughter, their Rolls Royce marooned in a blizzard, bringing with them the trappings of a life style clearly untouched by the

strictures of Attlee's Labour government.

Whether or not it was due to the wig that Jan Ryan wears as the disruptive Helen, but I suddenly realised that the character's whole philosophy is Thatcherian in tone and temper.

She chides her fellow guests for sitting round feeling sorry for themselves, advocates self help, and smugly admits that if she had been born a poor Italian she would have made a jolly good washerwoman and made the best of her situation.

Performances could hardly be bettered and several new faces swell the ranks of TTC. Edward Jeoffroy of Richmond Shakespeare makes his first appearance here as Helen's husband; and Kim Allen is attractively cast as daughter Tonetta. Nick Wilson as the consumptive John enjoys a welcome promotion from Youth Action Theatre, and Jan Ryan performs her first acting role with the club.

Among the Teddington stalwarts, three actresses

offer performances that bring their characters vividly to life. Jennifer Tudor is believably a widow in reduced circumstances, understandably irritated by Marion McLaren's rosy-cheeked vulgarian. And Alison Simon, in the performance of her life, steals the show from the principals as the unhappy Evelyn who nurses a secret love for an Austrian relic, played with impeccable accent by John Roth.

Re-arranged for a single setting, the play gains from being performed in Gordon Edwards' large hotel lounge, cleverly lit by Chris Davies to suggest both reflections from snowy exteriors and dingy lamps for the night scenes.

Meticulous attention to detail even extends to the correct brand of champagne, justified by the haunting scene where Alison Simon cradles the empty bottle in drowsy reverie.

Highly recommended, there are two more performances, tonight and tomorrow night.

John Thaxter

BACKSTAGE

Decadence at Hampton Court

JAN Ryan, whose work with Theatre Arts in Chiswick has already won her many admirers, opens tomorrow night at the Hampton Court Theatre where she had the leading role in N.C. Hunter's *Waters of the Moon* first seen in London in 1951.

This revival is being directed for Teddington Theatre Club by Peter Slater, who has previously worked with Jan at Chiswick.

The character she plays was originally created by

Edith Evans as a breath of decadent glamour in a world of austerity and gloom, as Britain struggled to recover from six years of war.

The Australian relic who loses his heart to her will be played by John Roth, the busiest man on the amateur circuit who is just about to begin casting for his own production of 'As You Like it'.

The last performance is on Saturday March 16th Club members can book seats on 01-979 6396 — membership enquiries should be made to 76-86714.

Period piece is given loving home by club

IT is strange the way that certain plays seem to undergo cycles of popularity and denigration, particularly among amateur societies.

There never appears to be a good reason for it, but it does mean that new generations can see pieces that have

pleased earlier ones.

At the moment, N. C. Hunter's *Waters of the Moon* is undergoing a renaissance, and the most recent production of it to come my way—at Hampton Court Theatre by the Teddington Theatre Club, playing all this week—is a lovingly realised

version of a genuine period piece.

Director Peter Slater has, wisely, not attempted to update the play, or its sentiments, in any way, and despite a few anachronisms the "feel" of the production is authentic.

The set, too, with its

geometrically arranged furniture rings so true, and Gordon Edwards has created the Devon hotel with a loving hand, while Chris Davies lit the whole thing superbly.

The playing was very much an ensemble effort, with even the lynchpin character of Helen Lancaster being integrated rather than a "star" performance—Jan Ryan achieved real stature with this reading of the part.

Alison Simon gave a spell-binding performance as Evelyn Daly, and was partnered most sensitively by John Roth in a beautifully understated personation of the Austrian refugee Julius Winterhalter.

Marion McLaren was gloriously raucous as Mrs. Ashworth, and Ivor Davis neatly military as Colonel Selby.

Jennifer Tudor was most affecting as Mrs. Whyte, although she came a little too close to breakdown in her scene with Robert Lancaster, played with restraint by Edward Jeffroy.

Nick Wilson overcame the great disability of looking far too healthy as John Daly with a performance of some power, while Kim Allen was delightful as the Lancasters' daughter Tonetta.

Betty Price's Mrs. Daly was, quite simply, superb. A first-rate evening—TTC back on form with a vengeance!
GEORGE ALLAN

MIDDLESEX
CHRONICLE

SURREY COMET

Stormy drama

IT is back to the early 1950s at Teddington Theatre Club's Hampton Court Theatre this week with a revival of N. C. Hunter's old post-warhorse **WATERS OF THE MOON**, closing tomorrow.

Even if the set, designed by Gordon Edwards, hardly evokes either the era or a typical small private hotel of the period, Peter Slater's firm direction and some sure performances, assure patrons of an absorbing and entertaining evening.

Here we have a latter-day set of orphans of the storm seeking sanctuary in a guest house bringing with them excitement, annoyance and heartache.

Of a mainly experienced cast, including four newcomers, one might single out for special mention Jennifer Tudor's somewhat dragon-like resident, seen last year as Lady Macbeth with Richmond Shakespeare Society, who effortlessly dominated every scene in which she plays. Close behind comes Jan Ryan's vociferous visitor, unbelievably her first appearance for the club.

It is interesting to note that the original score is written and played by Robert Ward.

JA