



Patrick and Miss Gilchrist in Brendan Behan's *THE HOSTAGE*, staged by Proscenium of Harrow—review on pages 4 and 5.

## DON'T SAY IT!

**Fire rules stop  
public showing**

—Page 12

# Proscenium captures the 'Hostage'

**TRAGEDY** and farcical humour are the ranges needed to capture Brendan Behan's **THE HOSTAGE**—and they were well and truly trapped by a Harrow group.

Proscenium was the group staging the play at Harrow Weald Memorial Hall on March 31 and April 1 and 2 and there's no doubt that they created the author's atmosphere. For "The Hostage" is one moment like a music-hall scene, then tender and lovable, then brutal as it tells the story of the capture of a British soldier by the I.R.A.

It coincided with the 50th anniversary of the Irish Easter Rebellion.

Weaving through the play is an air of happy abandonment with the use of songs, satire and farce which often overpower the main theme but are vital for the overall effect—and Proscenium achieved that effect.

General acting standard was high with some very strong performances contrasting weak ones. The actual characters sway judgement a lot (as in the weird I.R.A. chief, Monsewer, living in 1916 days with his bagpipes and "troop" inspections) but acting ability was put to a tougher test in the more normal parts.

Normal, that is, in the setting of an I.R.A. base turned whore-house where Pat and his part-wife Meg Dillon reign. Denis Grist played Pat and produced a mixture of grumpiness with humour in a character much older than him-

**REVIEW of final night of Brendan Behan's THE HOSTAGE staged by Proscenium of Harrow.**

self, though his Irish accent occasionally failed him.

His consort, Meg, was accurately depicted by Jose Pogson as the worn-out whore whose chief function is to moan and drink, sitting most of the time in typical legs-apart pose. Her accent was superb and maintained.

Entire action of "The Hostage" is in one room of the decaying brothel—and here, sadly, Proscenium were at fault. Scenery, just two side flats, a corner and a back wall with window, was tattily done with painted piping and unconvincing "torn" wallpaper—surely more could have been done.

Props are simple and natural—a bed, table and chairs. On this bed we first meet Colette (typically portrayed by Jeanne Hawkes) and a Russian sailor (given the correct amount of bafflement by Colin Harvey) who, after months at sea, decides any bed will do and begins to undress there and then.

He is whisked upstairs, also the hunting ground of a ragged Civil Servant, Mr. Mulleady. In his bowler hat and shapeless suit, James Young gave a first-rate

show, capturing the weakness and lost-look which makes one laugh yet feel pity for the man.

With him, after some hours of "salvaging our souls" in the fifth-floor back, comes Miss Gilchrist, a "sociable worker". Kathleen Jones took the part and made it the most memorable of the show, making full-use of the character's slightly crazed air of "religiosity" and prim naughtiness.

Her air of detachment during the frequent songs—accompanied by Norman Gee after a cue from the actors—was fascinating and she injected real emotion in "Don't muck about with the moon."

It was a shame that we heard the click-click of her battery "candle" in one scene.

After outbursts of dancing, bad temper and pure wit, we learn that a British soldier has been captured by the I.R.A. and will be held hostage for a boy in Belfast jail, due to be executed the next day. Leslie Williams (authentically shown by National Youth Theatre actor Dennis Marks) is the epitome of one of our soldiers, born and bred in the Old Kent Road.

The Cockney accent here was well-maintained and good balance was achieved with emotion as the hostage passes through pleasure at the hospitality, gentleness in scenes with the country girl skivvy Teresa, fear and then anger over the injustice of his fate.

Teresa was played by Jean Abrahams and one criticism applies to both—they were good but left me with only a general impression, due to an overall weakness of the parts.

**THE HOSTAGE** has 15 parts, 10 male, five female plus a pianist. It was first staged by Theatre Workshop at Stratford, E.15, on October 14, 1958.

## JUDGE DIES

Well-known adjudicator Mr. Malcolm Morley has died after illness. He was to have judged entries in the Ruislip Theatre Guild festival, but was replaced by Mr. Alfred Freeman.

One of the two memorable scenes was created as the execution dawn draws near. Everyone is on stage having various arguments and a general melee ensues, with Miss Gilchrist bawling "Land of Hope and Glory" from a table and climaxes to everybody playing at being a train when Pat kills the fun—a newspaper article says Leslie is to be shot as a reprisal.

This was perfectly handled—credit to producer Roderick Jones—with the stunning climax perfect.

The other top scene to me was the inspection of troops—a varied line-up with homosexual navy Rio Rita (a little too caricatured by Ralph Willett) and Indian boyfriend Princess Grace (Keith Davey), and the whores—with Monsewer making comments about "Fine body of men," "Colonials, eh?" and "You're doing a great job, my dear."

Ian Smith captured Monsewer's air very well indeed.

It ends with Mulleady revealing himself as a secret policeman, the I.R.A. base is raided—good fighting here—and the hostage being killed in the confusion. All rather futile, as Behan implies is the general state of Ireland today, living in the long-dead fighting days.

Whether the deeper studies of the play were appreciated or not, Proscenium can say they supplied the surface and depth demands of "The Hostage".

● Over 350 people saw the play. Proscenium needs more young men and women: contact Mrs. Joyce Gobey at HAR 6814.

## AFTERWARDS . . .

Actors and actresses in Harrow Council of Churches' show of "Man Born to be King" at Easter had a social on April 26—to discuss the success of the production. (See review on page 14).