

Loft Group

back to its best

In "Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead" playwright Tom Stoppard talks of truth — or rather the masks we wear, the parts we play and the daily dramas we act out to avoid facing reality.

RELISH

His two main characters — minor courtiers in the Shakespeare "Hamlet" — believe they are seeking that reality, struggling for truth in a web of illusion and lies. In the end the only truth they reach is the emptiness of the play's title. Now if all this sounds a trifle prosaic I do Mr Stoppard an injustice. For although his subject is serious he has written round it a superbly funny, and witty play.

And the current presentation by the Loft Theatre, Leamington, which opened on Wednesday does it full justice. This excellent group is back on top form at last, with a finely-wrought production by Bill Hamilton which, although played a little hazily in the opening moments, soon sharpens and lightens up.

We meet our hero-victims in a kind of limbo, tossing coins, and wondering why they have been summoned by King Claudius to the court at Elsinore.

We also see glimpses of the Hamlet story, and viewed through their puzzled eyes this classic tragedy becomes a muddled mess.

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are set on to discover the cause of Hamlet's madness. Much of the comedy arises from the way they botch the job, and come to the conclusion that the prince is "stark raving sane."

Dogging their faltering footsteps is the Player, leader of the troupe of actors brought to court to perform a special play for Hamlet.

They carry off the sequences of hilarious action and dialogue with all the dash of a seasoned double-act. Their subtle build-up of atmosphere and emotion grips the attention, and this was sadly spoiled on the opening night when all-too-audible bursts of offstage chatter ruined the strong start of the final act.

This left Messrs Ferriman and Toutoungi with the unenviable task of re-building — all credit to them that they did so with such swiftness and skill.

A share of the praise must also go to Peter Bleasby and Ronald Welch who are responsible for the simple but effective set, and sensitive lighting. — Yvonne McCreagh

May 23, 24, 25, 26, 28, 29, 30, June 1, 2 at 7.30 p.m.

"ROSENCRANTZ and GUILDENSTERN ARE DEAD"

by TOM STOPPARD

CAST	
The Protagonists	
ROSENCRANTZ	BRYAN FERRIMAN
GUILDENSTERN	EMMANUEL TOUTOUNGI
The Tragedians	
THE PLAYER	DAVID BIDDLE
ALFRED	GRAHAM WAGLAND
THE COMPANY	GUY BARTLETT, JOHN FENNER, JONATHAN HARGREAVES, IAN HAYMAN
The Danish Court	
CLAUDIUS, the King	ANDREW McWILLIAM
GERTRUDE, the Queen	PAM HARDING
HAMLET, son of the late King	RICHARD BAKER
POLONIUS	STAN PAGE
OPHELIA, his daughter	SUSAN HAMILTON
LADIES-IN-WAITING, SOLDIERS	ELIZABETH BALLANTINE, SALLY BAUGH, MICHAEL CRAF, MARTIN KINOLTY, BILL HAMILTON, MARTIN MALLORIE
AMBASSADORS	

DIRECTOR: BILL HAMILTON

The play is in three acts with two intervals of fifteen minutes.

Curtain: 10 p.m. approximately.

Costumes from The Royal Shakespeare Theatre.

Setting and Lighting designed by Peter Bleasby and Ronald Welch.
Stage Managers Jo Lord, Jenny Walters, Jeremy Blundell
Assistant Stage Managers Joanna Hastings, Sue Miller,
Lighting Assistants Geoffrey Mountford, Margaret Rees
Set Construction Tony Howard, Keith Postlethwaite, Robert Watts
Sound Albert Whitehairs, Telgarth Badger, Eric Beardsmore, John Wyatt Don Brooksbank, Vicki Bone

Loft give the dead a kiss of life



ROSENCRANTZ AND GUILDENSTERN ARE DEAD — Loft Theatre, Leamington, until June 2.

Controlled

THERE are times in this brilliantly conceived play by Tom Stoppard when Bill Hamilton's production comes to an absolute realisation of the author's thrilling sense of comedy.

But there are times, too, when Mr. Stoppard's comic potential appears to have been completely

By DAVID ISAACS

overlooked by the director. The result is a sporadically superb piece of theatre with irreconcilable hills.

Here we have the two characters from "Hamlet" discussing life and death and passing away the time while the action of Shakespeare's play infrequently intrudes on their discussions.

Emmanuel Toutoungi makes Guildenstern (at least, we think it is Guildenstern) sound like a Continental intellectual with a self-destructive yearning for truth. It is always a clever piece of acting which sometimes rises rather higher.

At his best, Bryan Ferriman provides a Rosencrantz (we believe it is Rosencrantz) who is a comic simpson, puzzled by most of his own thoughts and by everything which surrounds him. It is when he is at his best, notably in the first half of the second act — that Mr. Ferriman displays a comic inventiveness which is utterly memorable.

The only other part of significance is that of the Player, who is given a full but beautifully controlled "chroule" by the excellent David Biddle. Here we have the tragedian (sorry, "Tragedian") in all his Branby Williams glory.

In spite of its inexplicable blind spots, this is a production which has a good measure of satisfaction for the audience and the combination of the free-standing setting and lighting (for which Peter Bleasby and Ronald Welch are jointly credited) add its own distinction to the evening.

Well dressed

Among those who walk on and off, Stan Page's Polonius catches the eye with a singular contribution. The aid of costumes from the Royal Shakespeare Theatre means that the actors are well dressed.

The occasions when the production hits its peak — and these notably involve Mr. Ferriman and Mr. Biddle — are so keenly recaptured that they make the entire evening a most worthwhile experience.

