

THE LOFT THEATRE

presents



by

J. B. PRIESTLEY

MAY 21, 22, 23, 24, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31

DANGEROUS CORNER

by J. B. Priestley

About the play:
This was Priestley's first play, and was originally produced in London in 1932, with a cast that includes Marie Ney and Flora Robson. The author describes it as "an ingenious box of tricks."

Cast:
Freda Caplan HELEN ASHBOURNE
Miss Mockridge ROBIN PIETTE
Betty Whitehouse MARY WALSH
Olwen Peel ELSPETH DALES
Charles Stanton JOHN FENNER
Gordon Whitehouse BARRY LYTOLLIS
Robert Caplan TOM ATKINSON

Directed by **DOROTHY FENNER**

Scene: The drawing-room of the Caplans house

Time: Early 1930's.

There will be two 15 minute intervals between the three acts.

Curtain down approximately 9.45 p.m.

Set Designer David Ellis
Stage Co-ordinator Di Morris
Stage Manager Jack Lawrence
Assistant Stage Managers Rona Bain, Ann Wood
Lighting Design Mike Crisswell
Lighting Operators Ian Macpherson, Angus Macdonald
Sound Madeline Gorrell
Set Construction David Ellis, Keith Berry, Albert Whitehart,
Roger Morris, William McCrae, Laurence Myatt,
Elspeth Dales, Ann Wood
Photographs Roger Harris, Martin Savage

NO SMOKING IN THE AUDITORIUM

**Box of tricks
that has
lost its magic**

J. B. PRIESTLEY is one of our greatest writers — but that does not mean that all his work will remain evergreen.

There are some plays which were successful when they were first staged, but should have been gracefully interred long ago. "Dangerous Corner" — the new production at the Loft Theatre in Leamington Spa — is one of them.

Priestley himself described it as "an ingenious box of tricks," and it is easy to see how its succession of clever revela-

FIRST NIGHT

tions would have kept the audience of 1932 enthralled.

But although the play has remained a favourite with amateur theatre groups it is difficult to see how any modern production can do it justice.

The script reeks of the sort of country house drawing room clichés that tend to provoke a laugh just when the play demands tension. And once the "box of tricks" has been revealed there are more tangled relationships littering the stage than ever graced Peyton Place.

The play's "dangerous corner" is the point at which the characters decide that a few home truths should be told about the suicide of one of their relations. Instead of a few truths they get a flood, including lying, stealing, manslaughter, homosexuality and more adulterous affairs than in a French farce.

No-one is quite mannered enough or civilised enough and the emotion, when it comes, just looks like melodrama.

Only Mary Walsh, as the innocent Betty who turns out as corrupted as the rest, really gets to grips with her part and makes her revelation telling.

By the end of the evening I fully expected someone to bound into the room in white shorts and flannels and declare brightly "Anyone for adultery?"

C.E.

**Loft takes
corner in
low gear**

"An ingenious box of tricks" was how J. B. Priestley himself described his own first play, "Dangerous Corner," the current production at the Loft Theatre, which runs until tomorrow.

It was probably never much more than that — nor intended to be — although some of the themes touched on... infidelity, homosexuality and drug-taking... must have seemed quite daring to audiences at its first production almost 50 years ago.

Since that shock element has now disappeared, we are left with the "box of tricks" — theatrical tricks, of course, but as effective in holding our attention, or nearly so, as they were back in 1932. Even as early as his first play, Mr Priestley obviously knew how to engage the interest of an audience, and hold it through three acts.

Though the devices he uses may seem a bit too contrived to a 1980 playgoer, and some of the lines sound stilted, the play's basic theatrical strength is still there: we want to know just how — or rather, if — the "dangerous corner" will be negotiated.

MIDDLE CLASS

Priestley's themes here are two: that things are rarely what they seem, and that the truth can have devastating consequences, and may often be better not spoken. So we watch the twistings and turnings of a cosy middle-class group who come to grief at their "dangerous corner" as a casual remark, which as Priestley later shows could as easily have not been picked up, is pronounced on and worried to its disastrous conclusion.

David Ellis's set for the Loft production catches the flavour of a middle-class 30s drawing room quite sharply. But the one corner which Dorothy Fenner's production fails to negotiate smoothly is that of style. One has the feeling that the play was not fashio-

ned with the whole-hearted conviction that it could stand on its own merits in the more critical, less gentle, world of 1980.

The cast work hard to overcome this lack of a coherent style with the ladies coming through it far better than the men.

Helen Ashbourne gives a strong lead as Freda and shows — if it needed to be shown — what a not-less-than-competent actress she always is. Without her to push the others into some kind of dramatic response, the play might well have been anaemic and peopled with pale shadows.

She got most support from Mary Walsh as Betty, the apparently (but not so) empty-headed, slightly hysterical young wife, and from John Fenner, convincingly sardonic and mysterious as Charles.

LACKED AUTHORITY

Tom Atkinson lacked the vocal authority for Robert, the man intent on uncovering all the truth, and Barry Lytollis never came near finding the complex character of Gordon. Robin Piette gave us an engaging vignette as the lady novelist.

But for me the main disappointment was Elspeth Dales. This gifted actress might have seemed well-suited for the role of the highly-strung Olwen but she played it too high, too totally sincere and straight. Her performance would have been right in a more seriously profound play — but not in this "box of tricks." — Nigel Batley.

