

"UNCLE VANYA"

Repertory Theatre

Performance

Great Russian Play

THE CAST.

Alexander Serobyakoff (a retired professor): R. J. H. Risson.

Helena Andreievna (his wife, aged 27): Patricia Trace.

Sonya Alexandrovna (his daughter by his first wife): Beryl Telford.

Marfa Vassilievna Voinitsky (mother of the professor's first wife): Gwen Campbell

Ivan Petrovitch Voinitsky ("Uncle Vanya"—her son): Leo Guyatt.

Mikhail Lvovitch Astroff (a doctor): T. Stevens.

Ilya Ilyitch Telyegin (a landowner reduced to poverty): Jum Pendleton.

Marina (an old nurse): Rhoda Felgate.

A Workman: D. Henderson.

In asking the amateur player to attempt Tchekov's "Uncle Vanya," the Brisbane Repertory Theatre Society has sent a boy on a man's errand. One comes to this conclusion after seeing the first performance and after considering carefully the aims of the society.

An unusual combination of circumstances militated against its success from the beginning. They were attempting a play which, even when performed by Russians before Russians, at first failed to arouse enthusiasm and interest. Only after long years of misunderstanding was Tchekov accepted by his own countrymen at his true worth, and even then not unanimously. Players who knew the atmosphere which Tchekov was trying to create failed to impress Russians, who, too, were imbued with that same spirit. How, then, could one reasonably expect a set of amateur players here, some of them not having had a reasonable chance of developing anything like subtlety of technique, to impress an audience which in turn was

anything like subtlety of technique, to impress an audience which in turn was sadly handicapped in its efforts to seriously appreciate Tchekov's style and idiom? It is more than probable that neither the players nor the audience realised all of the elements of good in this great work. For great it is, in spite of technical objections that can be raised against it. The first act, for instance, is composed of a series of eight or nine long speeches and soliloquies linked together by snatches of dialogue. These long narrative philosophical speeches, many of them admittedly touched by a lyric beauty, weighed heavily on the shoulders of players who were forced at times to fall back on their elocutionary skill to carry them through. But the greatness in the play lies elsewhere than in the purely structural. It is in the consistency of mood, in the author's marvellous power to touch almost indefinable emotions, to weave them into patterns, to whisk us from one to another with brutal suddenness. The whole play is tinged with melancholy. It is in typically Russian sombre tones. It has little action and almost less plot. It is truly called "scenes from country life," and in those scenes the touches of colour have to be applied with a practised and well informed hand.

It can be easily understood, therefore, why all the players did not merge themselves completely and absolutely into their parts. Be it said to their credit that some of them did do so. The playing of Miss Rhoda Felgate and Miss Beryl Telford was as a benediction. Their work was blessed with a true warmth and sympathy which was in general lacking in other players.

Some of the misfortunes of the evening were due to injudicious casting. But these were heightened by the fact that a recalcitrant audience of ten laughed in the wrong place. Some of those laughs reflected discredit on the players; others reflected on the audience. It may be true that in some of the more intense scenes the highest flights of emotional drama were transformed into unpleasant melodrama. But it was obvious that some things were grievously misunderstood by the audience. Under the circumstances it could hardly have been otherwise.

Mr. Leo Guyatt has scored many successes in amateur theatricals, but his Uncle Vanya is not one of them. The part did not suit him. But apart from that his gestures were too

monotonous. The lines came from

monotonous. The lines came from him in the same way, and his miming corresponded exactly to that which he has adopted in other roles. He did make vallant efforts to capture the sense of futility to which this process of running to seed in a provincial backwater had brought him. But the audience laughed too often. They laughed, for instance, when he dropped that bunch of "melancholy roses," although there were contributory causes. Mr. Risson did good work in the second act, and consciously and unconsciously evoked amusement while indulging his petulance. But in the third act one never quite knew whether the professor was a cunning schemer or an impractical academic.

Patricia Trace acted very well in places, but did not speak every word distinctly, and maintained that languorous tone where it was out of place. Mr. Tom Stevens had that professional look—in fact, it was unfortunate that he did not have opportunity to show us an approved bedside manner. But his playing was without colour. He had a great opportunity in the second act, but failed to convince us of the potency of his Vodka, although Mr. Pendleton, with his arms akimbo and his hearty chuckles was much more emphatic on the point. Rhoda Felgate gave us a very sweet and very lovable conception of the old nurse, while Miss Telford was always convincing and seemed to be one of the few players who used facial expression to the best advantage even when she was saying nothing. The audience paid her a sincere compliment by laughing when she deplored her own ugliness.

The good work of Mr. George Eaton, the producer, should not be underestimated. For his was a gigantic task. If he did fail in recreating some of the parts as one would have liked, it was because complete success was impossible. He has had the advantage of seeing the play produced in London, and therefore acts in the matter with some authority.

During the intervals the Wilston State School Orchestra dispensed appropriate Russian music.

The play will be repeated to-night.