

## Look back in anger

A Red Flag shot up when I was asked to review 'Look Back in Anger'. As in 'Dated Play Alert'. Osborne's most famous work blasted a hole in the theatre establishment in the 1950s but nothing dates like novelty and, these days, the idea of youth angst being new is, well, old.

Osborne used this play to introduce the world to Angry Young Man but, a few decades on, we all know these men soon cashed in their anger for sensible careers, moved to the Suburb and had 2.4 children.

So I took my seat at the Institute full of apprehension that this would be nothing more than a historical curiosity. And I am happy to say the cast proved me wrong. Look Back was grimly up to date, though perhaps not for the reasons its creator intended. It came alive from the very first minute when we met the anti-hero, Jimmy Porter, bored in his bedsit on a Sunday morning.

It takes a special kind of talent to play someone as self-absorbed and boorish as Jimmy Porter, so I hope Nicholas Vause won't take it the wrong way when I say he was utterly and odiously obnoxious. Vause's genius is to keep the audience absorbed with the same dilemma we experience with people who cross our path in real life – is Porter fundamentally good with bad surface gloss or is it the other way around?

The other actors did their stuff too; Cliff Lewis was the teddy-bear chum of Jimmy, his even temper acting as a sort of measuring glass through which Porter's wild mood swings could be gauged. Zoe Crick expertly handled the subtleties of portraying Jimmy's wife, Alison, a girl with VICTIM stamped on her forehead. And then there was Kate Sanders. Any girl can be sexy in the right clothes and heels but not many

can leave you panting when given no more than an ironing board and an oversized man's shirt for props. Such was her sultry portrayal of the aristocratic Helena Charles, who arrives to stay, is so disgusted by Jimmy that she persuades Alison to leave him, then falls for him herself. There was also a nice performance from Rusty Ashman as Colonel Redfern, a man who grew up in one era and is having trouble adjusting to a new one.

And there is the genius of this play; the stuff about the Red Threat and white tile universities may sound dated but Porter's narcissism and self-absorption are bang up-to-date. You see this same myopia in the Big Brother house, in David Beckham and Tacey Emin and politicians of all stripes.

"John Osborne's coming back," said the play's director, Robert Jayes who remembers going to see it when it first came out in 1956. "It's usually a circle, that's what happens with John Osborne."

Look Back in Anger ushered in the modern age, an age when the young were overwhelmed with choices and can flounder as a result and with such sensitive handling, it remains totemic. Helena hates Jimmy, then loves him, then gets bored. Jimmy can't make up his mind who he hates and who he loves, while Alison simply loves him, helplessly and irredeemably. Osborne softens things at the end, showing the husband and wife back together again and playing their lover's game of rabbits and bears, but this is a very post-modern ending because, of course, nothing is really resolved. "People say, what happens to them afterwards?" Jaye told me, "I think they carry on living as they are." For anyone who missed it, my advice is to make sure you get tickets for the next one.

CHRIS STEPHEN

## Hectic times for the Horticultural Society



The first six months of this year have been hectic and enjoyable for members of the Horticultural Society and also for the committee.

In February a group of committee members travelled to Birmingham to present silver birch trees to the Balsall Heath Forum, who we felt deserved some extra help in beautifying their area after winning a prize in 'Britain in Bloom', against all the odds. Also in February, a coachload of us braved the cold for a 'Snowdrop Spectacular' visit to Benington Lordship and Myddleton House where the spring bulbs were spectacular. In March Patricia Liechti illustrated the making of her beautiful garden near Chesham with slides, and broke the news that she was just about to leave it after many years.

Thirteen optimistic gardeners entered the third 'Suburb in Bloom' competition in April, which was judged on a day of torrential rain. Prue Beard of Hampstead Way won first prize, Michael Franklin of Oakwood Road came second and Yvonne Oliver of Asmunds Hill and

Marjorie Harris of Erskine Hill came joint third. Congratulations to everyone who entered. There was very little difference in the marks awarded to those at the top and those further down the list and the judge was extremely impressed by the appearance of all the gardens.

A new venture in early May was the Hanging Basket Workshop, led by TV gardener, Matt Clawson, of Kristal Flowers. While the less intrepid among us watched, several participants, who had pre-ordered their flowers, got their hands dirty with moss and compost under Matt's clear instructions, and produced opulent and beautifully-arranged baskets ready to hang for the summer.

Later in the month, the sellers at the Plant Sale were almost overwhelmed by the demand for home-grown and bought-in summer bedding plants as the sun encouraged gardeners to decorate their gardens.

More than 70 took the Suburb Gardens Stroll round the old Suburb, visiting five open gardens on the way and raising money for the North London Hospice.

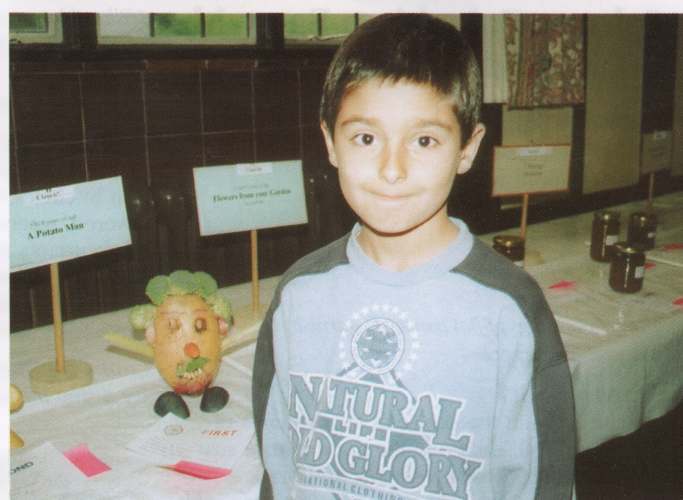
The outing to Hidcote Manor and Kiftsgate Court Gardens in June was fully-booked and much enjoyed by everyone who went. The famous Kiftsgate rose was in full bud and an unbelievable size. Suburb gardens will definitely benefit from this visit, since the luggage space under the coach was full to overflowing with lovely plants bought by the participants.

A successful 254th Flower Show rounded off the first half of the season in June, and visitors commented on the wonderful scent of the flowers, particularly the roses, as they entered the hall. Thank you to the Rev. Tony Spring for opening the show with such moving words and to Joan Rees Phillips and her team for providing copious home-made cakes and teas.

The 255th Flower Show will take place on 11 September. If your children and grandchildren are looking for things to do during the long and (hopefully) hot summer, why not get them to start now on their entries for the Show? There are cash prizes for all the winners. Age 5-8: Make a Vegetable Animal; Draw a Butterfly; Make a Cheese and Pineapple Hedgehog. Age 9-12: Make a Bark-rubbing of three named trees; Grow a plant from seed. Age 9-15: Make a scary cake for Hallowe'en. Any age: Photography; Suburb Views or Wild Flowers.

Membership details from Ruta Teteris (8455 9944). Adults £3 (double £5); children free.

MARJORIE HARRIS



## GS Theatre wins again



The Garden Suburb Theatre has again been successful in the hotly contested Barnet Borough Drama Competition.

Robert Jayes won the cup for Best Director for his production of 'Look Back in Anger', by John Osborne (see review, this page),

and also the shield for runner-up for the best production.

The Best Actress award was given to Kate Cleverley who played the part of Helena. This was her first performance with the theatre in the Suburb, which has flourished for over 80 years.

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