

AT SYDNEY
THEATRES

"The Hairy Ape"

THE *Hairy Ape*, maiden offering of the Lincoln Company, was given a city showing at the Metropolitan Theatre beginning Thursday 9th September, following a successful run at the Kuringal Theatre Guild last month. The plot of *The Hairy Ape* is such that bereft of its "inner" meaning it is one step removed from pure "mellodrammer". A brilliant producer and cast would be needed to pass over to an audience the concept of Yank as a symbol of pure brute force let loose without any compensatory intelligence to guide it and doomed to failure because of this limitation, and for whom death at the hands of an actual ape, his alter ego, comes as an emotional and intellectual catharsis. The other approach would be to present the protagonist as a melodramatic study of a profane uncouth giant, pitifully misunderstood by, and misunderstanding, his fellow creatures, with his death as a gruesome and fitting finale.

Alan Sisson, as producer, apparently tried to follow the more esoteric interpretation, with little success, and fell between two stools. Only when he followed the alternative interpretation did the play come alive, but unfortunately he was unsure which one he was following. Mr. Sisson should take note that noise, noise and more noise plus bursts of irrelevant action do not constitute good production. The sound effects, though excellent and atmospheric in design, completely drowned the dialogue.

ON the credit side, John Bunt as Yank was the highlight of the production. What he lacked in brute bulk he made up for in imposing physique and stage presence. Yet the producer misguidedly allowed or instructed him to force his natural, good-quality voice to harsh levels, making him sometimes completely unintelligible. Happily this forcing mostly gave way to his own charming voice with the variations in pitch and rhythm necessary to carry off the long speeches. In a role that is a tour de force for the competent actor, John Bunt gave us a sensitive and telling performance.

On the other hand, June Wilson's Mildred, who provides the emotional trigger for Yank's outburst, left me wishing that Yank had struck her a blow with the shovel he threw at her. Instead of the disdainful superiority which the role demands she gave us a colourless tiredness, tinged at times with juvenile sulkiness, making Yank's hatred of her hard to understand.

Bob Cumming as Paddy, the drink-sodden former clipper sailor now caged in a stinking stokehold, with drink as his only refuge, gave a likeable performance. His Irish accent was well done and he let us feel the pathos of the character; but he should watch his hand movements—at times it looked as if he would be in danger of flying. Geoff Hewitt's Long, the sneaking, rat-faced communist, was convincing in spite of his inability to keep still on stage. The rest of the cast gave performances ranging from adequate to downright bad.

Despite all this, I congratulate Mr. Sisson on his attempt to get away from the run-of-the-mill presentation. It was ambitious for a first production, and I hope that with time this group will achieve the better things they are striving for. Credit must go to George Clarke for his decor. The austerity of the steel bars as its predominant feature and its ingenious adaptability were commendable, particularly in the tense stokehold scene, when the decor and lighting were a perfect complement to the rising passion of Yank.

—D.B.