

# Art Theatre Progress

## *Unquestionable Vitality*

By A. H. THOMAS

**T**HE statistical review of the activities of the art theatre in Brisbane during the year, published last Saturday on this page, tell only half the story.

Mere statistics do not spell artistic progress. But where we have both quality and quantity together, I think we may well regard the past year as a most satisfactory one for all concerned.

But that does not mean that the whole position cannot be improved.

There has been a close and healthy rivalry between the Brisbane Repertory Theatre Society, which is nominally the head of the movement in Brisbane, the Twelfth Night Theatre and the Workers' Educational Association Society, in the standards of their productions. All of them have endeavoured to maintain the highest standard possible to play selection and presentation. There has been an entire absence of stunting. Far from that, rather should it be said that their activities have been marked by a sincerity of purpose and an unselfishness of outlook that accounts in a large measure for the successes achieved.

The vitality of this art theatre movement in Brisbane is unquestionable, and I think that we can rest assured that there will be no abatement either of activity on the part of producers and players or in the enthusiasm with which audiences have greeted their performances. At long last there has developed a theatre going public to give these organisations in Brisbane valuable support. That support is not as great in some cases as the treasurers and box office managers would perhaps like. There are occasionally rows of empty seats at the Princess Theatre (to mention only the largest playhouse available for this type of work). But it would be idle to suggest that there is not a public for drama when all of these societies can continue to operate, as they have been doing, and extend their activities as they have done in the past few years.

But there is scope for improvement in a number of directions. The whole movement needs an adequate central theatre in which all of these efforts can be concentrated. The Twelfth Night Theatre and the W.E.A. people have

be concentrated. The Twelfth Night Theatre and the W.E.A. people have long since attained a standard of performance which deserves a better setting and a better environment than they can possibly be given at the moment, in the small buildings in which they produce their work.

Even the Brisbane Repertory Theatre itself, with its comparatively palatial Princess Theatre, which is quite a costly item in the expense account, found itself and audience both with a moistened enthusiasm after a heavy rainstorm during one production. The Repertory Theatre Society and the art theatre movement in general, considering the sincerity and scope of its activities, deserves better than that.

## Public Taste Improves

**T**HE movement has over a period of years built up an enthusiastic public for its work. In the last few years, incidentally, the standard of appreciation and discrimination in the audiences at these performances has risen.

It is not long ago that a Chekhov play was ruined by a sniggering audience, who laughed at the points of highest dramatic tension. One can scarcely imagine a Repertory Theatre audience or any other audience doing that to-day.

Even then the average theatre-goer hardly realises how much time—nights and Sundays given to the work in a period when everyone appears to sigh for 48 hours in every day—is devoted to

period when everyone appears to sigh for 48 hours in every day—is devoted to this work. And at the end of the year, it should be "Hats off," not only to the producers, but to those hundreds of people who take minor parts and keep the art theatre movement rolling along.

The Brisbane Repertory Theatre Society has done some very good work during the year. A great deal of onerous work has fallen upon the producer, Miss Barbara Sisley, who has certainly justified the one-producer principle for the yearly operations. But there is scope for improvement within the organisation. A new spirit of activity amongst non-playing members is needed. That spirit might be engendered if the society could establish some central club room where members could meet and where rehearsals could take place.

The society badly needs better publicity than is given to it, both for the more general activities of the society and for specific performances of each play selected. The appointment of a publicity officer, devoting the whole of his energies in this one channel, seems to be the best move the society could make at the moment.

The need for such an officer is felt in a number of ways. The society needs closer contacts with the public it serves. The public heard nothing, for instance, about it at the last annual meeting.

It hears nothing about the deliberations which take place in the council or its committee of management. An organisation, depending on the public to a certain extent for its support, cannot be too open to the public.

make healthy progress while it preserves this cloistered silence. It needs someone who will express, coherently and frequently, whenever the opportunity offers, Repertory's aims, objectives, and ideas on the drama.

How these improvements can be brought about is a matter for the society members themselves. The blame attaches partly to members whose only interest in the society is the claiming of the privilege of seats when a play is being performed.

If every member of the society took their drama seriously I am sure that there would be a wholesale improvement in the general tone and spirit of the organisation.

## Leadership May

## Be Challenged

**T**HE Brisbane Repertory Theatre Society should be,

**T**heatre Society should be, and nominally is, the leader of the movement in Queensland. If some of the matters outlined above are not attended to in the coming year that leadership will be challenged.

The work of the Twelfth Night Theatre and the W.E.A. Society particularly has been successful because of the team spirit evident amongst members. The work is shared far more evenly in these two organisations than it is in repertory circles, and there is a happy spirit of co-operation that helps to tide them over many difficulties. The Brisbane Amateur Theatre, too, gets through a great deal of work with a very happy spirit prevailing.



MISS BARBARA SISLEY