

## MASKERS RUN RINGS AROUND THE ABBEY

Mottisfont Abbey is again the setting this week for an open air production by the Maskers Theatre Company, "Ring Round the Moon," by Jean Anouilh, a "pièce brillante," that has been drawing large crowds. There have been as many as 500 on some evenings.

The plot is one of those revolving round identical twins, Hugo and Frederick, who are romantically linked to Diana and Isabelle. As this is France of the 1920's, the age of the flapper and the country house party, there is a great deal of room for intrigue. The play is an elegant farce, beautifully written by Anouilh, witty and light as a feather.

On their fourth outing at this splendid venue, the Maskers have plenty of experience, but one important thing they seem not to have realised is that in the open air it takes very strong voices indeed to carry to an audience. The audience is too far away from the actors and actresses, some of whom are indistinct. This is an important fault, since otherwise, Philippa Taylor's production has many delights and is worth seeing. Anyone going this evening or tomorrow should arrive early and get a place near the front.

Brian Stansbridge, in his now accustomed role as leading man, is actually leading men. He plays the parts of Hugo and Frederick, and is able to change, in seconds, from the one brother, shy and timorous, to the other, confident and cynical.

Enid Clark and Angela Stansbridge make two very attractive leading ladies. There is no trouble at all about hearing Hazel Burrows, who plays Capulat, faded companion of Madame Desmermortes, Hugo and Frederick's aunt. Hazel Burrows pushes Madame around in a wheelchair. Her booming voice, in Scottish accent, and bustling walk, her shrieking and hooting mark her out as a character half a step away from the "loony bin" and always entertaining for spectators.

In a strong cast, her performance is matched by Sheila Clark, in a great form as the mother of Isabelle, always opening her mouth and putting her foot in it, and Sonia Morris as Lady India, dancing, intriguing and excessively dramatic in her pronouncements.

On Tuesday evening the play gained added ambience from the visitation of a balloon in the sky and the production has ended spectacularly each evening with a splendid display of fireworks in the gardens of Anouilh's French chateau.

## Polished acrobatics

**MISTAKEN IDENTITY**, trickery and a tangle of love affairs among 1920s high society are the order of this week's open air theatre at Mottisfont Abbey.

Southampton's Maskers Theatre Company is presenting a well-worked version of the light-hearted Jean Anouilh play Ring Round The Moon until Saturday.

Dominating the action is the confusion caused by two brothers with nothing in common apart from their identical outward appearance — and the plot hatched by one to prevent the marriage of the other.

The production's smooth feel despite many quick jumps from scene to scene owes much to the polished acrobatics of Brian Stansbridge in an onerous double role, playing both the scheming dapper Hugo and his bumbling twin and apparent victim Frederick.

Very evident too is the slick timing engineered by director Philippa Taylor on the attractive but very large natural stage.

Among the secondary parts character performances by Ken Spencer as worldly-wise butler Joshua and Hazel Burrows as anaemic lady's companion Capulat were particularly refreshing.

Particularly enjoyable is the sparring between the beauties at the centre of the play, poised ballet dancer Isabelle (Angela Stansbridge) and spoilt millionaire's daughter Diana (Enid Clark).

The period wardrobe and dazzling firework finale to the piece were other highlights.

There were a few first night slips — one a literal upending by one of the enthusiastic supporting dancers.

And towards the end the play dragged through a couple of heavier scenes where it lost momentum.

But as long as you are well-equipped with folding chairs or blankets and rugs and heavy jumpers Mottisfont is definitely a good night out.

BILL FOSTER

## Ring around the moon



Summer theatre from the Maskers in  
"Ring Around the Moon"

JEAN ANOUILH'S play "Ring Around the Moon" is the summer open air production by the Maskers Theatre Company at Mottisfont Abbey from Saturday until July 27th.

The play is a lighthearted charade revolving around the intended and accidental confusion caused by identical twins when one — or is it both? — falls in love with a beautiful heiress.

It literally ends with a bang and a flash as the characters, and the audience, watch a firework display.

The lovely gardens of Mottisfont Abbey, near Romsey, lend themselves well to the play, which is set in the gardens of a French Chateau.

This is the Maskers fourth year at Mottisfont and director Philippa Taylor's fifth open air production.

Playgoers are advised to take along a rug or folding chair and possibly a picnic, although a bar and refreshments are provided.

Tickets from the Box Office on Lockerley 40757, Shaws of Romsey or the Theatre Royal, Winchester.