



THE QUESTORS THEATRE COMPANY

First and only performance March 2nd 1980

THE WORLD COARSE ACTING CHAMPIONSHIP

It really all began in May, 1971, when The Questors held a fund-raising day known as a Drop In, where people were welcome to come along and pay to visit various activities ranging from sideshows to a performance of a melodrama. Among the events was a Coarse Acting competition, suggested by Alfred Emmet and hastily-organised by myself. It was such fun we decided to repeat the venture on a more sophisticated basis and the first World Coarse Acting Championships were held at The Questors in 1972, the winners being the Bunny Langridge Players from Questors with a delightful murder mystery take-off called *Streuth*. The adjudicator was Richard Gordon, of *Doctor in the House* fame, and the entries included a two-man team from the Royal Shakespeare Company, Roger Rees and Tony Pedley, who got one of the biggest laughs of the evening with their impersonation of the *Death of Caesar* as done by Hanwell Dramatic Society.

Perhaps at this point I should explain to anyone who is not familiar with the term 'Coarse Acting', that it derives from my book *The Art of Coarse Acting* in which a Coarse Actor is defined as one who can remember the lines but not the order in which they come; or who can remember when to come on stage but not where. If that doesn't make it clear nothing will, so I won't explain further except to say that in the Coarse Acting competitions we demonstrate not only acting but coarse stage management, directing and even writing.

After the 1972 competition The Questors House Manager, Denys Nelson, who had moved to Hampshire, organised a tournament in aid of the fund to build a new Salisbury Playhouse and Questors sent down the Bunny Langridge team with *Streuth*. That contest was won by the Maskers of Southampton against opposition which included the National Theatre (they were lovely, by the way). The next Questors contest was in 1975 and the Maskers and Salisbury Playhouse were the guest sides. The Playhouse won the title and the coveted chamber-pot trophy which they will defend tonight. They put the trophy in the foyer of the old theatre to collect money for the new playhouse and when it was opened in 1976 they celebrated with another Coarse Acting contest to which our Bunny Langridge Players contributed their D.H. Lawrence-style epic *A Collier's Tuesday Tea*.

That was the last contest until tonight but the story doesn't end there. In 1977 I formed a Company to put on a full-length show of Coarse Acting at the Edinburgh Festival, where The Questors had never been before. It was based around a nucleus of The Bunny Langridge Players and we did *Streuth* and *A Collier's Tuesday Tea* plus two new pieces by myself, *Il Fornicazione* (an opera based on a hilarious entry in that original 1971 competition) and *All's Well That Ends As You Like It*. Much to our astonishment it played to packed houses and rave notices and we repeated the idea last year with *The Coarse Acting Show 2*. This transferred from Edinburgh to the West End of London, when Brian Rix ran a season of the most successful Fringe shows at the Shaftesbury Theatre under the title *Lunatic Fringe*. Prince Charles came to see *The Coarse Acting Show 2* and afterwards met the cast, to whom he said, "It was the funniest thing I've seen since Edna Everidge." There's a photo in the Grapevine of Prince Charles being presented with a *Coarse Acting Show* badge by Kath Harrington.

So in our Jubilee year Questors achieved two landmarks — one of our shows transferred to the West End and Prince Charles came to see Questors at work. It seems a long way from the hastily-improvised items of nine years ago, in which most of the competitors were drunk, but perhaps it is not so far. For the thing that has always marked these competitions has been a sense of fun and if we have as much fun tonight as in those early contests then we shall be fortunate.

Finally, I am grateful to the Jubilee Committee of The Questors for including a Coarse Acting championship as part of the official Jubilee Year programme. Since only contests held at The Questors count as World Championships, the current holders of the title are Salisbury Playhouse, but their crown will be hotly disputed tonight.

MICHAEL GREEN

At the end of the last piece please remain in your seats for the presentation of the World Trophy and other awards.

ORDER OF PLAY

1. *The Maskers, Southampton*

PETER PAN

(after Barrie — a long way after)

The Maskers are old hands at Coarse Acting and old friends of The Questors. We first met at the Salisbury competition in 1974 when they brought the house down with their 15-minute version of *Hamlet*, played largely in a dense fog. They brought this show to The Questors Festival in 1975 and were our opponents again at Salisbury in 1976, when they did *Moby Dick*, which The Questors Coarse Acting Company borrowed and adapted for their 1979 Edinburgh show.

2. *Bristol University*

CINDERELLA

by Peter Farquhar and Philip Aldridge

Bristol University are newcomers to the competition and we extend them a warm welcome. Last year Michael Green visited them to lecture and his description of the competition so whetted their appetites they insisted on entering, under the mistaken impression the bar was to be open all day.

3. *Addenbrooke's Hospital Revue*

THE ADDENBROOKE SCHOOL PLAY

by Tony Costello and Clive Charig

Addenbrooke's are also newcomers, recommended to us by their off-shoot The Cambridge Revue, who shared the bill at the Shaftesbury Theatre last year with our Coarse Acting company. To them, too, we give our best wishes on their first appearance here.

INTERVAL

4. *The Bunny Langridge Players;*

A FISH IN HER KETTLE

by David Pearson

The Bunny Langridge Players are the original Questors Coarse Acting team, who won the World Championships in 1972 with *Streuth* (since taken to Edinburgh as part of the 1977 Coarse Acting Show). Total secrecy has surrounded their preparations to attack the title this time, but this may be because up to a late hour they hadn't finished the script.

5. *The Glebeland Players, Amersham*

PUBLIC DEATH

by Drole Wanco

This company may be unfamiliar but in fact they include several Questors, including Don Starkey, who has produced some of *The Coarse Acting Show* plays at Amersham. The author's name is an anagram — try working it out after the play.

6. *The Oppressed Minorities Theatre Group from Salisbury Playhouse.*

OH WHAT A LOVELY FRONT!

by C. O. E. Marshall

Salisbury Playhouse are World Coarse Acting Champions, having won the trophy at Questors in 1975 with their superb short version of Chekov's *The Seagull*, notable for the loudest-creaking boots ever heard on any stage. We much appreciate a professional company giving up their limited spare time to come along and they will bring with them the World Trophy which has remained at the Playhouse since they won it. Perhaps they will be taking it away again.

7. *The Cambridge Revue*

BALLET RAMPANT

We struck up a close friendship with Cambridge Revue during the Edinburgh Festival and afterwards when both shows transferred to The Shaftesbury. Tonight they present what is believed to be the first-ever Coarse Acting ballet with their presentation of an *avant-garde* dance — mime — drama based on a real-life medical situation.

Our Adjudicator

We are very honoured to have as our adjudicator Timothy West, artistic director of the Old Vic, who is also appearing in his own one-man show *Beecham*, based on the life of the famous conductor, at The Apollo Theatre. We also welcome his wife Prunella Scales, who is equally famous as an actress, and their family. Timothy and Prunella are no strangers to Coarse Acting, as in 1977, while appearing at the Edinburgh Festival, they came to see *The Coarse Acting Show* and talked to the cast of their own experiences.

Awards

The following awards will be presented:

The World Coarse Acting Trophy, a magnificent *objet d'art* of surrealistic design, constructed by Richard Lewis in our own workshops in precisely half an hour;
The Curtis Brown Cup for the best original script, kindly donated by Curtis Brown/Spokesmen, the London literary agents, whose clients include Questors members Michael Green and Janet Dunbar;
The Martin Bowley prize for the longest death scene (in the absence of any fatality, the trophy will be awarded for the longest pause or the worst performance). We are particularly grateful to our chairman for his generous donation which he is making in honour of his own death scene in *The Silver King*, which lasted so long that most of the audience had left by the time he'd finished.