

The politics of people's private lives

It is as much of a coup for David Edgar to write for Monstrous Regiment as it is for the company to have the services of such a distinguished playwright.

Although the predominantly female group does not officially regard itself as a feminist theatre company, it has certainly earned such a reputation during its three-year existence.

Its shows generally consist of hard-hitting propaganda for the Women's Movement -- made entertaining by skilful performances and the interjection of music and song -- and critics have suggested that these are talented actors in search of more stimulating material. Working closely with a playwright of David Edgar's calibre may well have provided some.

"We don't look on ourselves as a feminist group, even though we are probably all feminists individually," said Susan Todd. Her name appears with David Edgar's on *Teendreams*, which opened yesterday at Birmingham Repertory Theatre's Brum Studio.

"David and I share an equal passion for politics," Ms. Todd continued, "and we were mutually interested in the idea of looking at the political side of people's personal lives."

The "politics of the personal" is how she and Mr. Edgar like to refer to their combined interest. *Teendreams* explores the politics of the personal by taking a long hard look at the last ten years through the lives of a number of people who lived through them.

"It is not a play about the Women's Movement although, naturally, these years are the context in which we must view the Movement and from which it emerged," Ms. Todd explained. "The main character is a young woman who we first meet when she is at university in 1968. We follow her fortunes for the next ten years as she becomes a teacher and eventually learns to face much younger women in a different world of femininity."

It will be interesting for those

SUSAN TODD
Playwright

interested in such things to compare *Teendreams* with its predecessor at the Brum Studio, Fay Weldon's *Action Replay*, which also looks at the changes in women and female roles over the past 20 years.

Teendreams is the product of months of co-operation and feedback between Mr. Edgar and the six-woman, three-man company. "It is an optimistic play in the end," Ms. Todd said. "It shows how, although change makes us suffer, we do find a way to adapt and become stronger in the end."

Most of the company are in their 30s and share a sentiment for the last decade and a determination to progress and thrive in the next. Despite an understandable trace of nostalgia for the 1960s, Ms. Todd said: "The world in which young women are growing up today is a much better place -- I remember what it was like for women when I was 15 and I sometimes shudder about it. But perhaps each generation has to go through the whole thing on its own."

Unfortunately, David Edgar -- who managed to take three weeks off from his year in America to be at the play's Bristol premiere in January -- was not able to attend the opening last night. He will not return to this country until his marriage next month to a Worcester lecturer.

Mr. Edgar, it is fairly certain, will continue to experiment and expand as a writer. Whether Monstrous Regiment will go on to greater things or return to its comfortable rut depends both on *Teendreams* and the availability of new and challenging material for the future.

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