

"What Every Woman Knows"

WHAT the Players Theatre knows, or thinks it knows, after the flop of its mediocre *The Long and the Short and the Tall*, is that the female customers don't like all-male plays about war. The company is ending its season, therefore, with Barrie's *What Every Woman Knows*, in which war is between the sexes and victory is to the fair.



Brigid Lenihan

What every woman knows, of course, is that not so much behind each man as above him, holding the puppet-wires, loving her man-child, manipulating him for his own good, stands a woman. This harmless fiction, perpetrated by Barrie in 1908 no doubt with the suffragettes in mind, still appears to strike a sympathetic chord in the bosom of our burgeoning patriarchy. The man who gets taken along may also enjoy the early scenes, which contain some pleasant wit (here lies the well-known line: "There are few more impressive sights in the world than a Scotsman on the make") and he can always doze off during the later ones, provided only that he is careful not to snore. Barrie, like the knowing women he writes about, goes on a wee bit longer than need be.

The Players, directed by Stafford Byrne, give this fantasy a broad, confident and sprightly performance, swooping across a number of highly improbable shifts of mood in such care-free fashion they make the whole thing look easy. Brigid Lenihan, in the lead part of Maggie Wylie, is more convincing than Barrie ever deserved, holding her audience more than once at the needle-point of laughter and tears. Barbara Leake and Glenis Levestam likewise support the women's cause with skill and aplomb, though the first may bear a shade too heavily on the airily Gallic part of the Comtesse de la Briere, and the latter brings the challenging, aristocratic Lady Sybil of the first act a little too near to milk-sop in the second and third.

Harry Lavington, whose previous (type-cast) appearances with the Players have evidently concealed a fine talent for character, brings the exact degree of humourless obtuseness to the part of John Shand, the Scotsman-on-the-make whose political career the whole thing is more or less about. The minor parts are filled with the uniform competence (in the best sense of the word) which the Players have displayed from the beginning. The sets, by Quentin Hole, are wonderfully stuffy bits of Edwardiana. It will be interesting to see where his nice colour-sense takes him when, as we must hope, he is given a little more room in which to move.

—A.S.F.

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