

# THE ART THEATRE IN 1937

By A. H. THOMAS

**I** HAVE been doing some mental arithmetic about Brisbane's Art Theatre movement. Not so many years ago the sum total of this activity was three performances a year by the Brisbane Repertory. But this year at least 32 full length plays, and at least 50 one act plays, involving the performance of over 600 speaking parts, with dramatic entertainment provided for more than 51 nights in the year, have been provided purely and simply out of voluntary effort, and with no thought of gain or reward by those who participate in it.

I have confined my arithmetical ab-  
berations to the major productions of  
each of the art theatre organisations,  
and have been compelled to ignore the  
private productions of one act plays,  
and those performed at regular  
monthly meetings of the various  
societies. One organisation alone per-  
formed 28 of them, in addition to four  
major productions. It is the same  
with nearly all of the art theatre  
groups. And because the information  
was kindly compiled for me I quote  
the Brisbane Amateur Theatres'  
figure to indicate to what realms of  
higher mathematics we will be led  
if we took into consideration these  
one-act productions. . . . Their 28  
one-act plays and four three-act plays  
for the year provide us with the fol-  
lowing statistics:

In the three-act plays 42 different  
members played the 53 parts in them.  
In the 28 one-act plays 109 people took  
part. In the sum total 121 members  
played 228 speaking parts. Eighteen  
different producers were employed in  
these productions.

The Brisbane Repertory Theatre has  
had a most busy year. In the eight  
plays publicly produced there were 127  
speaking parts played by 75 persons  
on 17 nights of the year.

The Twelfth Night Theatre gave  
nine major productions involving 134  
speaking parts played on nine nights  
by 53 persons.

The W. E. A. Dramatic Society played

by 53 persons.

The W. E. A. Dramatic Society played  
three full length plays and five one-  
act plays involving 67 parts (num-

ber of actual performers not avail-  
able). And in their major produc-  
tions the Brisbane Amateur Theatres  
presented four major plays with 53  
parts employing 52 persons.

In these four major societies alone  
therefore we find that there were 24  
major productions and one evening  
of five one-act plays, involving 381  
speaking parts played on 41 nights  
of the year.

And that by no means exhaust the  
activity. A host of smaller organisa-  
tions have been active as well. The  
Little Cinema productions for 1937  
employed 41 speaking parts in pre-  
senting one major three-act produc-  
tions and seven one-act plays.

#### TIME EFFORT AND ENTHUSIASM.

How much time and efforts do these  
figures represent. The W. E. A. Society,  
for instance, spent 50 nights in rehear-  
sals alone. This society's work has been  
notable for the high quality of the plays  
it has produced. J. B. Fagan's "And So  
to Bed," based on the life of Samuel  
Pepys, was the most difficult play pre-  
sented this year, although in production  
difficulties "Idiot's Delight," Robert  
Sherwood's war play, ran it close with  
difficult off stage effects and a most dif-  
ficult climax at the end. "Green  
Waters," of Max Catto, maintained the  
standard and was entirely apart in type.  
The society does not lack courage, as is  
evidenced by their production last year  
of "Street Scene," with a cast of 100, in  
the All Saints' Hall with a stage about  
five times too small for the task. Mr  
George Eaton was mainly responsible for  
this endeavour, although this year Miss

this endeavour, although this year Miss Marjorie Mant was guest producer for the last production. In the seven years the society has been operating some 60 first class productions had been presented. Next year even bigger and better productions are planned.

The Brisbane Repertory Theatre has a bigger membership, and its activities are spread more diffusely over a bigger personnel. Thus only 13 performers have appeared in three productions or more. And the curious fact is that the record number for the year goes not to prominent members of the society who take major roles, but to people who are useful in minor parts. D. K. Cameron holds the record with six performances, and Robert Risson with five (two of them being in the one play). W. Shand Finlay had four. Tom McMinn four, Dulcie Scott, W. Williams, Nigel Jackson, Nancy Fowles, Tom Pollard, S. A. Clapyhan, G. Marshall, Ludo Gordon and J. Young three each.

**TWELFTH NIGHT'S FINE RECORD.**

The Twelfth Night Theatre has had a remarkably successful year. Perhaps the most interesting feature of the year's work has been the amount of good character studies that have cropped up here and there throughout the productions. If one were called upon to decide the destination of a gold medal donated for the best individual performance in the Twelfth Night Theatre's work for the year there would be headaches indeed. Recall, for instance, Babette Fergusson's performance in "Hay Fever," Mary Bulcock's in "Cat's Cradle," Marjorie Mant's in "Precious Bane," and Stanley Hildebrandt's in "Loyalties," or even Ludo Gordon's "Old Beguidy" in "Precious Bane."

Babette Fergusson's as "Mrs. Sarn" in the same play. The standard of work generally has been very high indeed.

Perhaps this is due to the fact that membership is limited to 50, and actually 23 players have appeared in three or more productions. Ludo Gordon and Len Bayley head the list with six each for the year.

The Brisbane Amateur Theatres organisation has been extremely active with its four major productions (A. A. Milne's "Belinda," Clemence Dane's "A Bill of Divorcement," "Leave it to Psmith," by Ian Hay and P. G. Wodehouse, and Noel Coward's "The Young Idea") and its 28 one-act plays.

Both the Repertory Theatre and the Twelfth Night Theatre use one-act plays extensively for the training of promising talent, and although statistics of these productions are not available the figures I have already quoted could be substantially increased.

Setting out the figures in tabulated form for the more active bodies we find the following interesting position:—

For the more active bodies we find the following interesting position:—

	Plays produced.	Parts played.	Nights performed
Repertory Theatre .. ..	8	127	17
Twelfth Night Theatre .. ..	9	134	9
W.E.A. Dramatic Society ..	4	67	7
Brisbane Amateur Theatres .. ..	4	53	8
Unity Theatre	4	174	7
Little Cinema	3	41	3
	32	596	51


It is to be noted in this table that the evening of five one act plays of the W.E.A. Society is accounted as one major production, and the two evenings of one act plays by the Little Cinema group as one major production each. The Unity Theatre played in all 12 plays, but these were composed of repeats of their popular successes.

**LUDO GORDON IS HARD WORKER.**

The palm for the greatest amount of work done by an individual player for the year goes to Mr. Ludo Gordon with nine performances of major roles—six with the Twelfth Night Theatre and three with Repertory. Tom McMinn runs him a close second with 8—four each for these two organisations. Esther Jones played 6, Stanley Hildebrandt 6, these again being shared by the two societies.

A great deal of useful discussion can arise from these figures. Next week I hope to examine them more carefully and see what deductions can be drawn therefrom.





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