

The "Little" Theatre has grown up

by JIM BYTH

FOUR nights a week young Brisbane body builder Brian Cannon knocks off when the whistle blows at the Tramways workshope

Soon after his brother Noel cleans off the grease that every motor mechanic collects in a garage.

Two hours later they are back in the days of Rome, plotting the death of Julius Caesar, and rolling out lines of Shakespeare.

They are a typical pair among the growing numbers of Brisbane and Queensland people who are acting, producing, or doing back-stage work in the "Little Theatre" movement — now not so little.

Those who should know, the organisers of the various groups, say that at least 1000 people will help to produce plays this year. Next year, they are sure, there will be more.

The improvement in acting and general stage production is equalled by the growing numbers who fill Brisbane's inadequate halls to see amateur plays.

Clerks, managers

LET'S take an inside look at the lives of the 30 people who are acting in the play which runs longest this year—the Brisbane Arts Theatre production of "Julius Caesar," which runs for a week from May 9, with a Saturday matinee as well.

Antony (Eddie Bourke) is a city photographer. Producer is well-known Cliff Pleak (remember him in the University's "Cocktail Party" last year?). He works as department manager in a city bookstore.

Others are office clerks, typists, switchgirls, students. One, Lorna Bollman, is still at school.

Brutus, the key role, is played by 17-year-old Garth Welch, who left school only last year, is working in a city office and studying ballet and art at

in a city office and studying ballet and art of speech at the same time.

There are no "stars." The amateurs work as a team. Often those in minor parts have had more experience than those who take the lead. Producer, stage manager, costume mistress often join in to make a crowd scene.

Glamour is out

WHAT brings them into acting?

Not the lure of the footlights, according to people who have been acting in their spare time for years. They say the glamour soon wears off with hard work—four nights a week and most of Sunday is normal practice.

"The glamour-seekers don't last long," one veteran amateur told me. "The ones who are worth anything become so interested they never want to leave."

"Maybe it's just the thrill of changing your personality, of getting inside someone else's mind for a few hours."

Why Shakespeare? First of all, it is the amateur company's bread and butter. There is an assured audience of school children "doing" the play for examinations.

Only an occasional one fails to make a profit which gives finance for significant modern plays.

Secondly, as English actor Robert Speaight said before he left Australia praising Brisbane and Adelaide audiences: "There is a growing interest in Shakespeare. More and more people realise he has something to say in our troubled times."

More men joining

ONE of the fastest growing amateur groups is Brisbane Repertory Theatre, which has jumped from 30 members in 1925 to 800 this year—and is still growing.

Dutch, Czech, German,

still growing.

Dutch, Czech, German, French and Russian migrants form an important section of Repertory's acting members, and later this year they will present a play in which they all have a chance to act characters from their former homes.

Repertory's full-time worker Olwyn Schoenheimer says the impossible is happening in the society this year more men are joining than women.

"And they aren't namby-pambies, either," she says. "They're big blokes with deep voices—just what we need."

But women are still in the majority in amateur theatres. One male actor said: "After all, they can always get married. They don't have to worry about a permanent job."

A woman said: "We just like dressing up and changing our personalities."

Perhaps the most significant development this year is the Drama School being run by Twelfth Night Theatre for young actors and stage workers from every theatre.

Not just the Brisbane theatres, either—they come from Rockhampton, Mackay, Gympie, Bundaberg, Maryborough, Stanthorpe, Ipswich, Southport, to hear lectures on all aspects of stage work.

English actor and producer Stanley Hydebrandt was brought specially to Brisbane for the school, will produce plays for twenty years. Leading Australian artists, Margaret Olley and Charles Bush are lecturing, as is University music lecturer Hugh Brandon.

Playhouse needed

MORE than anything, now, the amateur actors want a big modern playhouse—a new building or a converted theatre—to beat the congestion that makes it necessary to book the inadequate Albert Hall up to a year ahead for each play.

They want seating space for bigger and bigger audiences.

More than anything, they want a stage that, unlike that in the Albert Hall, is wide and deep enough to allow plays to be put on without jamming the actors into an impossibly small space.

Since the war, their record is one of constant achievement. And—to quote Rhoda Felgate, the premier lady of Brisbane's amateur theatres— "This year is the most exciting ever."