

# Amusing, and intriguing, double-bill

THE DOUBLE-bill presented by the Nairobi City Players at the National Theatre provides a very amusing, as well as intriguing, evening. **The Dock Brief**, by John Mortimer, is a witty sketch of an unsuccessful barrister provided by the court to defend an unsuccessful murder.

With his first brief in years, the barrister is full of ideas for the defence of his reluctant client, who blatantly admits his guilt; but his dreams of how he will sway the court don't quite work out as he expects. Nevertheless, the ending is a happy one thanks to a neat twist in the tail.

As the barrister, Donald Whittle (on right) is delightfully persuasive. However, his superannuated Puck — although missing none of the inherent comedy — is not Mortimer's "Morgenhall". Morgenhall has sadder depths — depths which Mr. Whittle does not

ments for his characters, he would have been wise to give more attention to putting their "third dimension" in perspective.

**The Real Inspector Hound**, by Tom Stoppard, is in complete contrast — though still in a comedy vein. It claims no depth, but makes up for that in the ingeniously satirical use of words and situations. It shows two dramatic critics at the first night (in London?) of an obviously bad (but inevitably to-be-successful) "whodunnit".

Producer Benny Goodman has computed the mechanics of his production excellently — with the exception of the appalling lighting. He has also intimated in a pre-opening interview that as the critics onstage say everything, there is nothing really left for us "live" critics to say.

Taking him at his word, I'll just remark that, while the performances in the play-within-the-play are supposed to be rather poor, they should be intentionally so — two of them, unhappily, were "for real". In compensation, Geoffrey Best's performance as critic "Birdboot" was superb and the gem of the whole evening; and David Field as a James-Agate-type critic proved a first-class foil.

After Mr. Best's demise, the production sagged to a fizzling anti-climax, however, which I'm sure neither Mr. Stoppard nor Mr. Goodman intended, and which no critic — either onstage or off — should allow to pass unremarked.

FIRST NIGHT



ROBERT BEAUMONT

begin to plumb. We do not laugh, as Mortimer intended, at the ridiculous tragedy of failure; we laugh at Mr. Whittle being funny — which is sadder.

Andrew Warwick is more successful as Fowle, the bird-seed seller. But, once again, the point of the character is very occasionally blunted when Mr. Warwick's own intelligence comes to surface in place of Fowle's dumb-cloddish common-sense. Since producer Denis Patience had little to devise in the way of move-



Two familiar faces to Nairobi playgoers — the husband and wife team of Dorothy and Denis Patience — are behind stage this week for the latest production by the Nairobi City Players, due to open at the National Theatre on Friday. Denis is producing "The Dock Brief" while Dorothy is stage director for this play and the second half of the City Players' double bill, "The Real Inspector Hound". The picture was taken during rehearsals at St. George's School.

## City Players

One reason for the Nairobi City Players' choice of *The Real Inspector Hound* as a part of their current double bill at the National Theatre, I suppose is to disarm criticism of their efforts.

If taken seriously, which luckily is impossible, this unusual and diverting comedy by Tom Stoppard would put paid once and for all both to critics and to "thrillers".

It takes place during the first night of a banal murder play watched by a pair of pompous critics — the melancholy Moon (David Field) who, as second-string critic for an apparently intellectual rag, feels permanently overshadowed, and the bluff Birdboot (Geoffrey Best) who tempers criticism with a personal interest in actresses.

The play they are obliged to watch is of the type I hope nobody ever writes. Certainly, I wonder anybody but Moon and Birdboot