

Classic Miller tragedy at National Theatre

AT THE END of the first act of the Nairobi City Players' "A View From The Bridge" which opened at the National Theatre on Thursday night, I could very gladly have left.

For the play seemed to "drag" and lose touch for quite long periods and never seemed to rise above itself.

Considered by many critics to be the best of the few plays written by American Arthur Miller, "A View From The Bridge" is set in Brooklyn, New York.

IDEALS

The hero, Eddie, is caught up into the world of ideals, and is "torn" with his love for his niece Catherine — played by Paula Brown.

It is a tragedy in a classical sense with undercurrents of moralities. Is his act of "betraying" two Sicilian brothers who entered America illegally to be forgiven because, as he put it, the younger one "is a 'punk' who wants to marry Catherine to become an American citizen"?

Bryan Epsom — who played the lead role — gave an effective performance. He was inclined at

A VIEW FROM THE BRIDGE

times to race his words in the first act but seemed to settle down in the second.

His best scene was indeed in the second act in the lawyer's office.

On the other hand, however, Paula Brown never seemed to settle into her role. She was competent, but I feel that a lot more could be made of a few of her scenes, especially where she asks her husband-to-be whether she must suddenly turn against Eddie.

BRILLIANT

Peter Pearce did all that was possible in the role of Marco, the elder Sicilian. Indeed his final scene — a duel to the death — with Eddie was brilliant.

When last I saw "A View . . ." it was performed by a professional cast who got very little more out of the death scene.

Full marks also to Frank Horley as the younger brother. For

the part of the blonde Rudolpho he dyed his hair.

As he told me later: "You have enough to worry about without the added worry of a wig."

His Italian accent was very good, spoiled only when, giving a rendering of "Paper Doll", he slipped into normal English.

GOOD PLAY

While the rest of the cast gave a quite adequate performance — especially Ted Scott as the lawyer — my laurels go to Dorothy Gibbs who as Eddie's wife Beatrice, gave a wonderful performance.

Her diction was terrific and from the moment she stepped on stage she gripped her audience with fine use of the stage and her brilliant timing.

I feel that if producer Peter Brown can "tighten up" the first act and do a few "running repairs" he could well have a very good play.

All in all I was glad — I waited until the final curtain.

— R. W.

NAIROBI CITY PLAYERS PRODUCTION of "A VIEW FROM THE BRIDGE" by Arthur Miller
WHAT THE CRITICS THINK

	John Mann — <i>Sunday Nation</i>	"R. W." — <i>Sunday Post</i>	Peter McDonald — <i>E.A. Standard</i>	Robert Beaumont — <i>Daily Nation</i>
The Play	A remarkable play.	Considered by many critics to be the best of the few plays written by American Arthur Miller, "A View From the Bridge" is set in Brooklyn, New York.	So all credit to the City Players not only for bringing this excellent play to the Nairobi stage.	I have not, myself, seen a straight play in Nairobi so enthrallingly written and so well produced and acted for a couple of years or more. It is the best thing the City Players have done for six years, and a wonderfully satisfying evening in the theatre which no honest cognoscente can afford to miss.
The Production	Peter Brown's sensitive production — The fact is that I saw an extremely good local production of a remarkable play.	... the play seemed to "drag" and lose touch for quite long periods and never seemed to rise above itself. I feel that if producer Peter Brown can "tighten up" the first act and do a few "running repairs" he could well have a very good play.	... also for a hard-working and efficient production. Having said that it is also necessary to add — sadly — that this is a production which lacks heart. An unwelcome breath of patronising cynicism has crept in where there should be only humanity.	Peter Brown's production, as I have indicated, is masterly. His understanding, imagination and delicacy of touch has brought Peter Brown forward as the best producer of this kind of play that Nairobi has probably ever had.
The Set	Wrong too is Peter Chiarletti's set — properly stark, but unnecessarily scruffy, and crudely furnished.	No mention.	Peter Chiarletti's set is beautifully executed but by its openness and airiness tends to dissipate the tension which could be heightened by more suggestion of the confined and constrained atmosphere of a waterfront slum.	Peter Chiarletti's setting is practical, anonymously evocative and effective.
Bryan Epsom	His interpretation is right — intelligent, generally skilful and altogether believable. There is a certain sameness and stiffness in his movements, and perhaps not as much light and shade in his delivery as there could be. But this does not detract from his considerable achievement in putting Eddie over as a pitiable slob, to be despised while alive and mourned when dead.	Bryan Epsom — who played the lead role — gave an effective performance. He was inclined at times to race his words in the first act but seemed to settle down in the second. His best scene was indeed in the second act in the lawyer's office.	In the hands of Mr. Brown and Mr. Epsom Carbone becomes, at times, a mild figure of fun. This should not be — he is there sometimes to be laughed with, but never to be laughed at. Mr. Epsom is also occasionally too pat with his lines for a character whose tragedy is his inability to express himself. Apart from these two faults, however, it is an efficient and at times powerful performance.	Because they are a team I will not speak of performances individually. Ted Scott, Bryan Epsom, Dorothy Gibbs, Peter Pearce, Frank Horley and Paula Brown are all first rate.
Dorothy Gibbs	Dorothy Gibbs, only a shade too genteel for her class, is totally involved as the anguished wife.	— my laurels go to Dorothy Gibbs who as Eddie's wife Beatrice, gave a wonderful performance. Her diction was terrific and from the moment she stepped on stage she gripped her audience with fine use of the stage and her brilliant timing.	Another good performance which rises to excellence as it reaches its climax — is that of Dorothy Gibbs as Carbone's wife.	Their hard work and sincerity are self-evident in the depth of the characters in which they have breathed life, and the precision and polish with which they are presented.
Paula Brown	... as is Paula Brown, dealing so proficiently with Catherine's difficult hysterics.	On the other hand, however, Paula Brown never seemed to settle into her role. She was competent, but I feel that a lot more could be made of a few of her scenes, especially where she asks her husband-to-be whether she must suddenly turn against Eddie.	Paula Brown, as the niece, steps very neatly from one emotion to another, always effective, always seeming just a little out of place, except towards the end when the whole production reaches its most convincing level.	Their devotion to the play and their teamwork has transformed a bunch of well-known individual amateur actors into a corporate cast of good professional standard.
Peter Pearce	... in sharp contrast to the mastery Peter Pearce had over Marco, whose immensity and presence was felt to such an extent that even when he had nothing to say he commanded attention.	Peter Pearce did all that was possible in the role of Marco, the elder Sicilian. Indeed his final scene — a duel to the death — with Eddie was brilliant.	The performance which stands out in this production is that of Peter Pearce, as the older of the two immigrants. From the first he builds up the feeling that he is Carbone's master — the man who can either save him or destroy him. This is done with great dignity in a performance that is a masterpiece of controlled power.	If I have "raved" about the Nairobi City Players' production of "A View From The Bridge", I'm glad. I'd like you to rave too. It just shows what can be done in Nairobi's theatre, given the will and the guts to do it.
Ted Scott	Only Alfieri, the commentator, was wrong. While the others speak with clipped colloquial lucidity, his dialogue is soft, at times poetic, but not, I think, to be delivered in the sepulchral tones Ted Scott used: Alfieri is a sharp, hardened lawyer, not a preacher.	While the rest of the cast gave a quite adequate performance — especially Ted Scott as the lawyer.	Ted Scott has a difficult and complex part as Alfieri, the lawyer, to whom Carbone goes for comfort and who, at the same time fulfils the function of a chorus. As the lawyer Mr. Scott is excellent, as chorus I found him a little cold for an essentially human personality.	N AIROBI City Players are noted for their sense of publicity and their productions are always good for a gimmick — but a production such as their present one, Arthur Miller's "A View from the Bridge", seemed to offer little scope in this direction, being more "highbrow" than some of their recent shows.
Frank Horley	Frank Horley, in character as Rudolpho, was too nervously gauche —	Full marks also to Frank Horley as the younger brother. His Italian accent was very good, soiled only when, giving a rendering of "Paper Doll", he slipped into normal English.	As the younger immigrant Frank Horley is too much like a comic Italian to be true. Admittedly this character is a genuine figure of fun but it has its redeeming qualities which I did not find in Mr. Horley's performance.	However, the City Players have done it again. Audiences attending this week's performances are receiving an addition to their programmes, in the form of a tabulated selection of the views of the various Nairobi critics showing just how controversial opinions of this play have been.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

over the same show. The audience, in turn, is asked the question: "What do you think?"

Our own critic was heard to mutter that he had only one criticism of this idea — that his name had been misspelled — but I understand that he and his colleagues are to get together on V.O.K.'s programme "Be My Guest" tomorrow.

The group tells me that this is not offered in any sense of "cribbling" against unfair criticism but merely to show audiences how critics can differ

A play you cannot afford to miss

IN the variety and music halls of Europe and America there is invariably a chap on the bill called a "prestidigitateur" — conjuror or magician to you!

He often wears full evening dress, with a satin-lined cloak; and he has on the stage with him one or more attractive "jeunes filles" wearing fluffy nothings, whose job it is at some point in the act to wheedle unsuspecting customers out of their seats in the auditorium on to the stage to assist the master in his tricks or illusions.

Metaphorically, that is what Arthur Miller and the Nairobi City Players are combining to do with *A View From The Bridge* at the National Theatre.

The Players have put on a play which I — along with several other people I know — did not think I was really looking forward to seeing. And within a matter of minutes I felt as if I had been wheedled on to the stage to mingle with, to live with the people who had sprung to life there, to take part in the events encircling them and to share their joys and sorrows.

I have not, myself, seen a straight play in Nairobi so enthrallingly written and so well produced and acted for a couple of years or more. It is the best thing the City Players have done for six years, and a wonderfully satisfying evening in the theatre which no honest cognoscente can afford to miss.

Arthur Miller's play is about people — real people; you know they're real — you can

ROBERT BEAUMONT REVIEWS 'A View from the Bridge'

see them and be with them yourself.

All right, so they don't live in the best of neighbourhoods, or in the best of houses. A new tablecloth is a joy for them; to go to the cinema is an event.

They're just immigrants from Italy and Sicily — some of them illegal — "submarines" these ones are called.

They work on the docks in the Hudson River for ten pounds a week — they live and work under the spidery shadow of the Brooklyn Bridge.

Their past was in Europe; their present is concerned with relatives and relationships; their future... Will they have one? Has a man like Eddie Carbone, for instance, a destiny?

Yes, Eddie has a destiny. It is a small one. Few will witness its consummation. But it is a destiny — a tragic one, worked out by Miller with classical inevitability.

Tragic in the sense that Eddie comes into conflict with the society in which he lives; a society whose rules are not fair for him because he happens to be Eddie Carbone, a likeable, lumpy longshoreman — "a bear



Bryan Epsom, Dorothy Gibbs, Paula Brown and Frank Horley in a scene from "A View from the Bridge" at the National Theatre, Nairobi.

with very little brain," with plenty of relatives, with principles.

But they are principles not guarded by the law. And he is a confused man.

Miller's ability to "hold a mirror up to nature" with just that degree of exaggeration which makes everything so much more real makes him a great playwright.

Their devotion to the play and their teamwork has transformed a bunch of well-known individual amateur actors into a corporate cast of good professional standard. His understanding, imagination and delicacy of touch has brought Peter Brown forward as the best producer of this kind of play that Nairobi has probably ever had.

What kind of play? No, no, NO — NOT "kitchen sink." Don't let anybody tie that stupid label on it. The breed does not, in any case, exist in American drama.

"Tragical-comical"? Perhaps, because it is a play of humani-

ty; and if it is set against a sordid background that is just chance, because the people and situations recur in all walks of life, in all generations.

Because they are a team I will not speak of performances individually. Ted Scott, Bryan Epsom, Dorothy Gibbs, Peter Pearce, Frank Horley and Paula Brown are all first rate.

Their hard work and sincerity are self-evident in the depth of the characters into which they have breathed life, and the precision and polish with which they are presented.

Peter Brown's production, as I have indicated, is masterly; and Peter Chiarletti's setting is practical, anonymously evocative and effective.

If I have "raved" about the Nairobi City Players' production of *A View From The Bridge*, I'm glad. I'd like you to rave too. It just shows what can be done in Nairobi's theatre, given the will and the guts to do it.