



Geoff delivers a tour de force in world premiere

WORKINGTON Playgoers Club raised the curtain on their new season this week like they've never done before — by performing the world premiere of a riveting new comedy by a master playwright.

The fact that 48 other Little Theatre Guild of Great Britain companies were doing the same thing at about the same time took nothing from the

uniqueness of a splendid occasion.

John Godber's "Happy Families" was commissioned by the guild and sponsored by the British Telecom biennial project.

The success of this very funny piece of theatre clearly stands or falls on the quality of the work that goes into the central character of John Taylor, a likeable rebel with a restless spirit and a superbly droll sense of humour.

The Playgoers' Club has come up with Geoff Hall — and for me he hits it right on the button with a performance that is a veritable tour de force. Especially so on the opening night when some cast members were patently not completely au fait with a script that is obviously a stinker. It's not that there's anything highfalutin about it, it's just that it's rapid and contains much butting in and many repeat lines.

Ranged behind the central player are a selection of family from far and near — a family wherein nearly all human life can be found. They could be your family or mine, occupying various stations on the ladder that is society and containing some phonies mixed in with the good eggs. Derek Thompson as Vic Taylor, John's father, does some brilliant work and constantly evokes memories of the late and great Leonard Rossiter. Pauline Harkness, Geoff and Marjorie Hool, Anne Dickens, Sylvia Paulin, Carol Jamieson and Sally Burgess (in a very minor role) snuggle well into the psyche of the characters they play.

SKETCH

A very difficult play to stage, it is not at all difficult to follow — mainly because there is no conventional plot. It is more of a richly developed sketch about a family of ordinary working folk which moves forward chronologically as cheeky John Taylor grows up in the 1960's and 70's.

For me that movement definitely loses a lot of momentum as act two wears on and I would have

thought that the author could easily have trimmed 30 minutes or so from the finished product.

MUSIC

Other things to savour in this very enjoyable piece are recorded music from just about anyone who made a recording between 1930 and 1964, skilful use of dead-stop pauses in the action and memorable lines from Derek Thompson like: "He was the only tree that picked his nose" in recalling John's part in a school play.

For those like me who failed the 11-plus, John's experience of secondary modern school will bring back some vivid memories of unforgettable playground games like flicking ears, spitting on each other and much worse.

Jenni Rushton is the director and the play runs until October 22. Recommended.

PHILIP CRAM

• Our picture shows rear: Pauline Harkness, Derek Thompson, Geoffrey Hall, Sylvia Paulin, Carol Jamieson, and Sally Burgess. Front: Geoff Hool, Marjorie Hool and Ann Dickens.