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PICCOLO TEATRO OF MILAN AT THE LYCEUM THEATRE, EDINBURGH

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"QUESTA SERA SI RECITA A SOGGETTO"

By LUIGI PIRANDELLO

Dr. Hinkfuss MARCELLO MORETTI
The Heavy Woman .. GIUSO DANDOLO
The Low Comedian
ANTONIO BATTISTELLA
The Leading Man ... TINO CARRARO

Mommmina VALENTINA
Totina
Dorina GABRIELLA
Nene OLIVIA

PRODUCED BY GIORGIO STREHLER

FROM OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

EDINBURGH, AUG. 30

After Goldoni, Pirandello comes to the festival from the Teatro Piccolo Company of Milan, and it is Pirandello at his most pirandellist that they have brought with them. *Questa Sera Si Recita A Soggetto* ("To-night we Improvise") is the third play in the trilogy of the theatre that began with *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, and we are back in a theatre of conflicting levels of experience.

Pirandello's obsession with the way all forms of interpretation inevitably distort, by the introduction of the subjective, has the form here of letting producer and actors "spontaneously" work upon a story—an early one of his own full of passion and horror—and through this free play of the interpreters he aims at nothing less than to define the nature of performance and direction by isolating their effect on a text.

It is a tall order, but the company who have considerably adapted the original play of 1930 (which involved interjections from the audience and a sequence of film) to their own needs fulfil most of Pirandello's outrageous demands with the same nimble brilliance that they gave to Goldoni. Dr. Hinkfuss, the producer, played as perplexed in the extreme by Signor Marcello Moretti, explains at the outset that to-night they will improvise and dissension soon

breaks out between him and the actors, whom frequently he leaps on from the wings to interrupt. The tale they have taken involves one of those desperate Sicilian families—a drunken father in love with a café singer and four daughters only one of whom succeeds in marrying—who were Pirandello's earliest inspiration.

In a happy period before the father's death the family go to the opera and the audience goes behind the scene (most ingeniously staged) as well as in front of it. This visit to the theatre within the play is put over with a superbly timed exuberance by the players, whose altercations with the producer are as fierce as those with each other when they get home to find that Mother has toothache. They end by overthrowing their director altogether, and enacting the last scene on their own. It takes us many years on to see the married girl in a delirium, after a violent quarrel with her husband, remembering and actually performing songs from the opera before she collapses on the floor. Signora Valentina Fortunato gave this soliloquy most formidable attack. Who is "dead"—the character in the opera, or the character in the play, or the actress? The crucial question teases us before she gets up from the floor to be acclaimed by the other performers. The piece sets going more questions of this order than it answers; but its profound probings into the imagination are, as this production revealed so zealously, themselves stated with an unbroken flow of theatrical unexpectedness.