

"JOHNSON OVER JORDAN"

Première of Priestley Play in Glasgow

If they regarded the two years spent at the Athenaeum as a probationary period, an experimental prologue of trial and error, members of Glasgow's Citizens' Theatre may now look upon themselves as authors well qualified to write a long and powerful chapter in the history of Scottish drama. From every point of view last night's opening performance in the Princess's Theatre will be recognised as a brilliant initial page.

Mr J. B. Priestley's imaginative and difficult play "Johnson over Jordan," a play never before presented outside London, was performed by a company of maturity, experience, and skill.

For the theme of his most unusual work, Mr Priestley has dipped into the Tibetan Book of the Dead, in which the State of Bardo is described. According to Tibetan belief, Bardo is an intermediate dreamlike State which follows immediately after death, and Mr Priestley conveys his own present-day conception of it. He does so with grimness and fantasy, with lightness and gaiety, but never with flippancy.

There are regular glimpses of the Johnson household, the first being the congregation of mourners, undertakers, and clergy, but most of the varied action takes place in three contrasting scenes—the bewildering, bustling examination hall in which Johnson's pedigree and worthiness to enter into the hereafter are checked; the magnificent night club, complete with cocktail bar, where Johnson's inhibitions come to light in his thirst after the pleasures of the flesh; and the peaceful inn at the end of the world where order is brought out of mental chaos.

With never a false move or word, Mr Priestley makes the remarkable transition from the dance hall setting, with its host of evil, masked, and grotesque figures, to the inn at the Edge of Beyond.

This is largely a one-man play, and the man is John Roderick. In a most arduous and exacting rôle, one which calls for much moving, though never emotional acting, Mr Roderick gives a performance which could not be bettered. Joan Matheson, Jane Cain, Michael Bradley, and James Gibson have a little more to do than the other members of a flawless company.

Mr Matthew Forsyth will be well pleased with his debut as producer for the Citizens'.

Introduced by Mr James Bridie (Dr O. H. Mavor), Lord Provost James Welsh and Mr Thomas Johnston, former Secretary of State for Scotland, expressed good wishes and congratulations at the curtain fall.

"We see the birth of a great effort in adult education," said Mr Johnston.