

A promise is fulfilled

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A PROMISE IS FULFILLED

A cultural event not to be missed was what was promised those who bought tickets for the Monodramas performed in London's French Institute Theatre at the beginning of December by Heddy Maria Wettstein. And that is precisely what those who braved one of the coldest nights of the year got.

Miss Wettstein performed three monodramas, *Demeter sucht Persephone*, *Der Turm der Salome* and *Das Fenster*. To say that the audience sat in stunned silence as the artiste — or should one say the solo cast of many? — trod her dramatic and moving way round the stage.

This versatile and unique performer was almost punching her messages home, messages which were sometimes so powerful, sometimes so difficult to absorb at one go, that their full significance would not hit home fully until the following day at the earliest.

We were left in no doubt about the truth of some very fundamental facts — that heaven and the gods are more powerful than earth and Hades, that

every living soul is dependent on external and superior forces and, above all perhaps, that death the great leveller comes to us all sooner or later.

These and other messages which came across with such force might give the impression that Miss Wettstein's performances were morbid. Indeed, some might describe them as so but that would be to overlook the great talent and dramatic ability of this incredible performer. London was privileged to see her and the audience could be forgiven for thinking at times that the stage was peopled by many more characters than just the incredible Miss Wettstein. A glance at the following potted history might serve to convince.

For the last 13 years, Heddy Maria Wettstein has had her own theatre in Zürich. In 1967 it was enlarged thanks to support of private donors, and today, her theatre at the Winkelwiesse is Zürich's finest small-stage home of drama and comedy. Heddy Maria Wettstein is an adept at both, and her monodramas are unique. They are no sterile monologues,

on the contrary, the artist enlivens the whole stage with fictitious characters who come to life thanks to her tremendous creative powers.

Swiss authors write new pieces for her again and again, although her repertoire contains works by many foreign writers.

Her shows have been televised, and she has recently had a most successful tour in Israel, sponsored by the Swiss Cultural Foundation "Pro Helvetia".

The tour of Great Britain was also under its sponsorship. It is to be hoped that we may soon see Miss Wettstein on stage again.

Until then, we must content ourselves with the memory of a performance in a million. For the benefit of those who were unable to attend, a summary of the three monodramas is published below.

WGS

THE WINDOW

By Jürg Amann

The monodrama *The Window* is the first play written for the stage by the young Swiss author Jürg Amann. He wrote it for Heddy Maria Wettstein. His play *The End of Venice* has just had its first performance at the Zürich Schauspielhaus.

The Window is a macabre game between illusion and reality, in which, true to nature, death is the laughing third party, triumphant in the end.

An old woman spends the end of her days at the window of her little flat. Day after day she watches the funeral processions passing from the village to the near-by cemetery. She had known them all, and all of them were younger than she herself. And from the fact that she, the old one, is still alive whilst the younger ones die one by one, she makes herself believe in grotesque distortion that she becomes more immortal with every day she grows older. In sinister and piercing dialogue with her imaginary granddaughter, who has to read to her the new obituary notices in the paper every morning, she creates an ever intensifying delusion of immortality, behind which the tragedy of an old, outlived woman alone in her dying hour is hidden, to be followed by death as it must according to the inexorable logic of life.

DEMETER SEARCHES FOR PERSEPHONE

By Robert Heinrich Oehninger

Demeter, against the world and the Gods, is looking for her daughter and



One of the multitude of dramatic faces of Heddy Maria Wettstein.

finally comes to realise that death goes with life just as night with day, shadow with light and winter with summer. Whatever is to blossom in the light of the sun has to prepare itself in the shadow of death. Persephone will always return to life. But she will also descend to the underworld of death. Belonging equally to both realms, she is an eternal "memento mori" for the living and everlasting hope for the dead.

THE TOWER OF SALOME

By Silja Walter

Salome has finished her dance. Grown old, she is still captive of her early guilt. Release is only possible through God above. Through that God whose face was alight behind that of the prophet she had had killed. In retrospective religious ecstasy she recognises the divine in him whom she has sacrificed to the dance of her youth. By releasing him symbolically from the prison of death, she releases herself in divine betrothal and finds herself.

In the contradiction of the biblical figure, the nun Silja Walter holds a dialogue with herself.

HEDDY MARIA WETTSTEIN IN CAMERA – AS SHE IS – OR IS SHE?



And two more of the Swiss star's many and varied faces – pathos (left) and humour.