



Outlandish spectacle: Richard Briers and Geraldine McEwan as the old couple in Ionesco's *The Chairs*

It's absurd, but I like it

THESE really is no account for fashion. At the start of the year, if you had asked me to name two forms of entertainment that had never reached the very nadir of my taste, I have said "progressive" rock music and the theatre of the absurd.

And then Radiohead released the brilliant *OK Computer* and Caryl Churchill composed *Top Girls* with the marvellous *Blue Heart*, and your reviewer was left feeling like a wally.

Now the two degraded sides and originals are beginning to crawl out of the woodwork. First this week a double live King Crimson album (see 17).

Then on my desk, and now being even dearer to me, is a production of *The Chairs* (1921) by Ionesco, the biggest of theatrical outfits, the

Theatre

The Queens Royal Court at the End of York's *The Chairs* is really as unimpressive as I feared. Ionesco described the play as a "tragic farce" and it certainly is. But it is not his (or the DA) who has the dark, glossy and glibly designed by the Queen's Theatre (see 16).

Richard Briers plays the old man with virtuoso mood swings, one moment he is prelatiously sitting on his wife's knee like a little boy. The way in which he manipulates the guests fill the room is superbly characteristic of Ionesco's style, and a stock of which both

language, drama and a few comic-strip verbalisms on a blackboard which include "God is gone".

The acting, or rather the lack of acting, is perfectly clear. But Ionesco's production gives the play a grand, almost theatrical spectacle with the help of lovely performance from Richard Briers and Geraldine McEwan.

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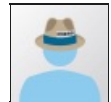
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