

Miscast Lipman gives 110 per cent in role of an agent

MAUREEN LIPMAN contributes greatly to the gaiety of nations, but sometimes – particularly when she plays ditzy American characters (in the work of Neil Simon, say) – there's a faint sense that she is condescending to the part, visiting it as royalty might a day-centre for the elderly.

There's no danger of her patronising her new role at the Hampstead Theatre. In Alan Plater's *Peggy For You*, La Lipman impersonates the legendary real-life play agent Margaret (Peggy) Ramsay, the woman who had the cream of postwar British playwrights on her books.

But Lipman, for all the undoubted skill of her comic timing, is fundamentally miscast. It's like watching Dame Edith Evans struggling to do an impression of Maureen Lipman. The latter's physical character and rhythms are naturally uptight and anxious. Lipman dutifully captures Ramsay's mannerisms: the stocking-feet walk that's like an ostrich trying to avoid land mines; the imperious, free-associative telephone technique. But if

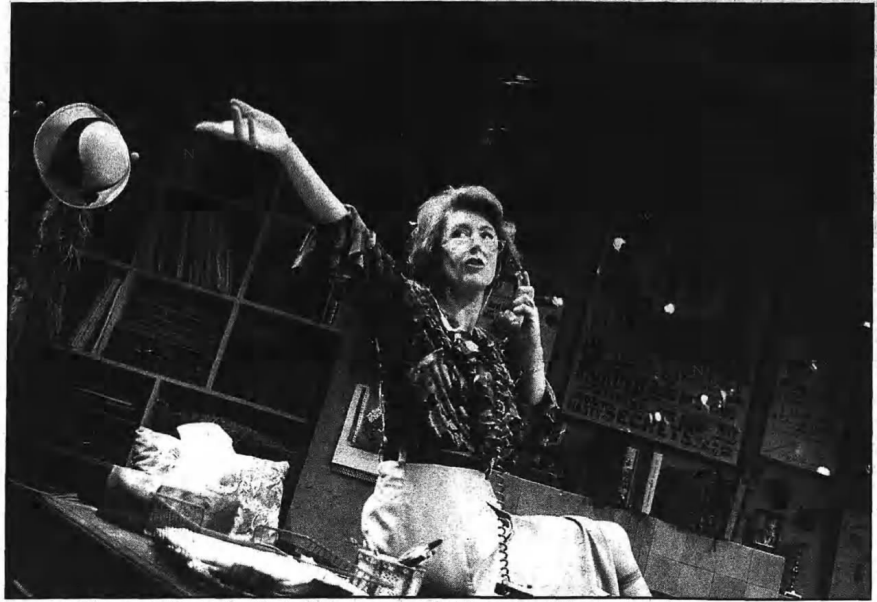
FIRST NIGHT

PEGGY FOR YOU
HAMPSTEAD THEATRE
LONDON

the spirit of the woman comes through, it is mostly thanks to the wit and the shapeliness of Plater's script.

Directed by Robin Lefevre, this very entertaining play set in the late Sixties offers us a day-in-the-life of Ramsay, in which her romantic and ruthless philosophy of life and art is illustrated as she deals with four different types of playwright at different stages of their careers. At times, her relationship with her clients takes the trajectory of championing an unknown, then urging him to live dangerously and avoid marriage and happiness to keep in touch with his inner demon, then – if he starts to be successful – losing interest in him. But the play also richly demonstrates that being represented by Peggy Ramsay must have been as inspiring and risky as being taught by Miss Jean Brodie.

PAUL TAYLOR



Maureen Lipman in 'Peggy for You' which opened at the Hampstead Theatre last night

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