Theatre

From Guardian 11/24/66

Oswald play lacking in drama

By W. A. DARLINGTON

THERE is not much in the way of criticism to be written about Michael Hastings's documentary piece at the Hampstead Theatre Club, "The Silence of Lee Harvey Oswald.

You enter the tiny theatre knowing what everybody knows about the assassination of President Kennedy—or perhaps a little more than that if you have read the text, conveniently available in a Penguin edition.

You sit rather more than two hours and a half while the facts elicited by the Warren Commission are brought before you by every conceivable variety of stage effect. You leave, having had a most interesting experience, but without learning anything much.

Considered as a stage piece, this composition suffers inevitably from lack of drama. The object is not to tell a story with the assassination as climax, but to build up Oswald's character from the known facts, to see if he fits into the pattern as a potential killer.

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Undoubtedly he does. The man who had already had a go at Gen. Walker and might have had one at Mr. Nixon if his wife had not persuaded him to leave his gun behind would hardly have had any qualms about shooting the President if he had the chance.

But did the bullet that killed the President come from Oswald's old rifle, or did it come from the direction where the rifle was found? It seems to me, as a layman, that some official must know the answer to one or other of those simple questions.

If so, then the real mystery of the Kennedy murder is the silence of a gunnery expert and/or a doctor rather than of Oswald himself, who was shot before being brought to trial and asked to explain himself.

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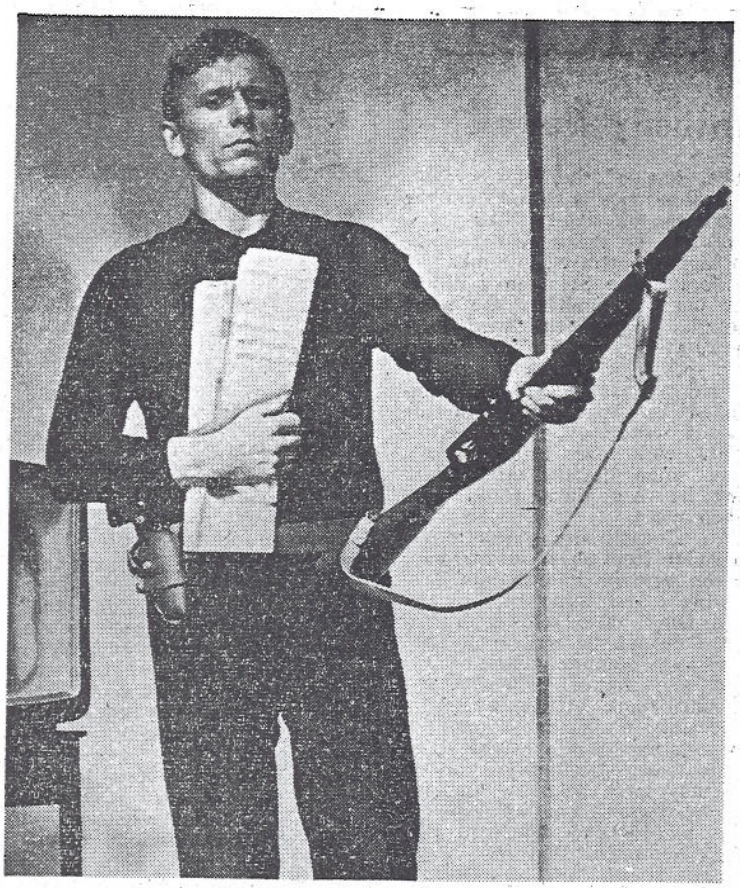
Alan Dobie as Oswald, Sarah Miles as his Russian wife Marina and Ronan O'Casey as the Interrogator do everything that is required of them, and Bessie Love, with a gift character part as Oswald's mother, who never says five words if 50 will do, gives a remarkable performance. As director, Peter Coe does wonders in the space at his disposal.



Alan Dobie as Oswald in "The Silence of Lee Harvey Oswald" at Hampstead Theatre Club.