

Scene

A weekly look
at the arts

Power to the People's in tribute to a master

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He is also the man behind a show to be staged next Wednesday which it is hoped will raise up to £1,500 towards a new appeal to upgrade further a base which has already been transformed in recent years.

The show is called I Like This People's Theatre — which many of the People's regular supporters will know is a quotation from a radio broadcast made by George Bernard Shaw nearly 50 years ago. Incidentally, I'm told that he hated the name George, so in deference to the great man it's the last time I shall use it.



• The People's day Shaw Carol Greenwood and Roger Howe in *I Like This People's Theatre* (1988)

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Mr Goulding's idea was to stage a fund-raising show to coincide with the publication of a biography of Shaw by Michael Holroyd to be published this month by Chatto and Windus — or rather the first volume of that biography, covering the years up to 1898.

Mr Holroyd was invited to attend next Wednesday's show but unfortunately he will be on the other side of the Atlantic. Instead he will be represented by copies of his book, which will be on sale in the theatre foyer.

Shaw, of course, had a special relationship with the People's Theatre, which is thought to be the only company — professional or amateur — to have staged every one of his plays. He also paid two visits to the People's Theatre in 1921 and 1936.



● The People's play Shaw: Carol Greenwood and Roger Hogg in *Man and Superman* (1980) and (right) Pam Smith and Gordon Russell in *Heartbreak House* (1982).

Incidentally, tickets for this special gala evening, which are now available from the People's Theatre box office, cost just £5 — with all the proceeds going to the £80,000 appeal which has been launched to provide a whole series of improvements.

It is proposed to renovate the facades of the theatre including a new canopy, to improve the foyer and entrance area, re-design the art gallery and provide extra seating, upgrade the toilet facilities, add a new ramp to help the disabled and a sound loop for the deaf.

But to return to the show, Christopher Goulding admits that he reacted against Shaw when he was

a young man in the National Youth Theatre. Although, ironically, the NYT's base was at the Shaw Theatre in Euston Road at the time, he and some of his colleagues took a rather dim view of work of the Irish wit, critic and playwright.

"As a young lad I never liked Shaw's plays," he confesses. "I thought that they were very long-winded — and I suppose some of them are. But as time has gone by I've got to like them more and more."

The show he has compiled includes extracts from *Pygmalion* and *My Fair Lady* — "well, I wanted there to be some music in it" — and

also uses the raw material of Shaw's correspondence and other writings to demonstrate the man's sometimes quite pithy wit. "I can be emphasising the special relationship that our theatre had with Shaw — that's a recurrent theme throughout the show," says Christopher Goulding.

The compiler-director will, himself, be narrating and we shall see two Shaws — in the persons of Gordon Mounsey and Gordon Russell, the latter reading the speech made from the stage of the People's Theatre in 1936 — a speech which is thought to be the very last he made from a public platform.

Although not a member of the People's, Tyne Tees Television announcer Neville Martin played Professor Higgins — a role he has undertaken in *My Fair Lady* several times. Another popular local entertainer joining the company for the occasion is Joe Ging, who will be presenting a little item called *Brush Up Your Shavian*.

Anita Fishburn, Eric Peel, Jude Jones, Helga McNeill, David Tarkenter, Barbara Harrington, Pat Dunn, Anne Cater and John MacDonald will also be helping to enliven an evening which has been born out of one good idea and an enormous bundle of enterprise.