

MERETE BATES

GUARDIAN

The Ritual Theatre is the name of a group of musicians and performers directed by Barry Edwards whose exploratory work at the Crucible Theatre Sheffield has no exact precedent. It springs spontaneously from each individual, and is not directed from an external, superior power. It strives to evolve only from the inner creative nerve. And it stretches, rather than closes, or consoles.

Talking to Barry Edwards the aim behind the work grew clearer. The structure is a very simple arrangement of sounds - wood, wind, string, metal. Each sound stirs an emotional response in the performer or audience. Sound is explored as it evokes emotion. One emotional response in the group touches off another. The work starts among scattered twigs, sticks, dead leaves. Preoccupied, the group makes sounds from the wood - tapping, scraping, rustling and whipping. The lights dim, nightlights flicker. There begins a dry rattling, like sifting, falling grains, echoed like the wind through air, then its some distance away. On and on. Suddenly a flute sobs. A viola quivers in response. The cello plumbs firm and deep. Finally a voice spits, guttery sound. Hysterical chatter. A shriek. Bodies leap, gesticulate, join. Sound and bodies move together.

The performance was intended to continue for seventy minutes. But it was ruptured. Striking, whirling a huge iron triangle, the strings snapped. The triangle was hurled, narrowly missed the head of a man in the audience. Total silence. It says something for the emotional aim of the group that, with this accident, the show ended. After both had joined and even begun to play together the tension between audience and performer had been broken.