

Last in a daring new line

By IFAN PAYNE

DURING his talk given in St David's Hall last night, the composer John Metcalf described Stravinski's *The Soldier's Tale*.

It is, he said, a work designed for the simplest form of theatrical presentation. *The Soldier's Tale* is both a traditional Russian folk tale and a contemporary morality tale.

John Metcalf was discussing the aims of the St Donat's Music Theatre in general and the performances to be given that evening of *The Soldier's Tale* and his own theatre work *The Crossing* in particular.

His description of *The Soldier's Tale* could equally apply to *The Crossing*.

This title refers to a double journey, that of the artist George Grosz crossing the Atlantic and meeting Kathe Goldstein, and that of the crossing told by the Russian sailor which in turn is retold by Mrs Goldstein.

And then there is Grosz's own political and artistic "crossing" from fighting the rise of Nazism to an acceptance of the fact that the battle is over and lost.

The production is also simplicity itself: two singing characters, a handful of musicians (conducted by David Seaman) and an effectively economic staging.

This is a tightly-knit production influenced by Brecht's principles of distancing, filtered, as it

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must be today. However unconsciously, through the work of Orson Wells. Both Richard Stuart and Alison Truefitt were effective as Grosz and Kathe Goldstein respectively.

But opera and music theatre spring from the dramatic impulse. And as Peter Stein pointed out most tellingly in talking recently of his WNO *Otello* production, actors and singers need a correctly scaled space within which to develop the necessary dramatic mastery of the material.

I could not help feeling that in this production the large expanse of the St David's Hall stage dissipated the dramatic tension.

On the other hand Valerie Doulton's entertaining staging of *The Soldier's Tale* benefited from the encompassing and defining of the acting area which was created by placing the orchestra and pavilion on the stage. The production also benefited from Frank Rozelaar-Green's engaging Soldier and Diana Judd's excellent Narrator.

This concert was the last in St David's Hall's exciting and stimulating, but all too brief, series of contemporary music concerts presented under the title *Who Dares Wins*.

I hope that the management will dare to put on a longer series as soon as possible