

Rat in the Skull at Chapter, Cardiff

Not enough menace as scenes lack sparks

By IFAN PAYNE

FROM *Dixon of Dock Green* to *The Sweeney* and *Hill Street Blues* the over-familiarity of television has made it difficult for dramatists to hold the attention with the interrogation scene let alone with a complete play centred on an interrogation.

Rat in the Skull performed by Section 23 Actors Company at Chapter on Wednesday evening started out promisingly with brief, well-paced scenes, effectively lit by Michael McCarthy.

But what should have been an intense exposition of the Irish condition centring on two integrated interrogations lacked tension.

It soon became evident that Ron Hutchinson's agile script also lacked consistent development.

Deprived of the spark that might have zapped the acting with a shot of electricity, *Rat in The Skull*, directed by John Biggins, slumped in the middle and oozed formlessly.

REVIEW

That might still have tasted well enough if this were a soufflé gone wrong but was a less happy condition for a play of social realism with ethical overtones.

However, unencumbered, as the first act had been, by an over-long central scene, the second act moved with more control.

With captor turned victim it was a clever illustration rather than a gripping drama of the ambivalence and complexity of the Irish situation.

The production had attracted many a face familiar from local dramatics among the audience and, in the event, there were several of them whom I would have preferred to watch bringing life to Hutchinson's often clever script.

Too much soft-edged Jack Warner perhaps. Barlow, I think, would have brought more of a sense of menace and ambiguity to the situation.