

## Shakespeare in slapstick sizzle

By PETER THOMPSON

SLAPSTICK is the hallmark of Gerry Stembridge's production of Shakespeare's Comedy of Errors for the Dublin Youth Theatre, which opened last night at the Project Art Centre.

There is more than a touch of the Laurel and Hardy about this director's handling of this funny show, which was the master's first play. The fine mess the characters are in, in this case, is the old stalwart of mistaken identity. Two chaps called Antipholus, identical twins, get separated in early childhood, babyhood actually, with their identical twin slaves, both called Dromio.

The fun starts when they meet up again over 20 years later, especially as one of the Antipholus chaps is by this time married. As the wife, Adriana, can't tell one from the other, we get a story worthy of the talents of Brian Rix at his earliest and most inventive. This particular plot has never gone wrong.

Shakespeare is always difficult to do well for a modern audience, but when dressed up like this show is, the Comedy of Errors is eye-catching. Connie Dowling has the actors dressed as sort of giant liquorice all sorts, blue and pink in chunky pieces of foam carved into shapes relevant to their various characters, this allows the director great freedom in his use of the players, especially the hapless servants, the Dromios, are beaten up by their discontented employers, without any ill effects.

The show is physical and lovely, never pausing for breath, and combined with the costume design, allows the lan-

guage to come through wearing its sixteenth century weight with commendable elegance.

This acting is, as it nearly always is with this group, terrific. For my money, Patricia Eastman as the beleaguered wife Adriana was the star of the proceedings, in a performance which never indulged itself. Fergus Matthews and Anthony Brophy play the hapless Antipholuses, with a suitable sense of the grotesque, bizarre, unprecedented and unheard of situation in which they find themselves. This one is well worth it, ending early at 9.45 p.m.