

Hard times

Theatre group recaptures London life in the thirties

IN THE last two months Pam Schweitzer's Age Exchange Theatre (YOURS, February) has given over fifty performances of its *Fifty Years Ago Show* in community centres, sheltered houses, institutes and clubs. It has been widely acclaimed and appreciated, especially by the older audiences, whose life in many cases it recalls and recaptures.

Members of the theatre company visited Greenwich pensioners in their own homes and in sheltered housing units, to build up a picture of the early 1930s. National and local events, popular songs from music halls and movies have also been incorporated.

The period was chosen, Pam explains, because of 'its relevance today — the similarities between the years of the Depression and the times we are passing through now'.

The show follows the fortunes of a family, whose husband loses his job. It demonstrates the divisiveness of unemployment; the escapism provided by the cinema; the rise of Mosley's Black Shirts; above all, the way the women coped with the poverty.

Age Exchange, which has been supported by Help the Aged and the Greenwich Arts Council among others, has now received a grant from the Greater London Council, and will be giving a special show at County Hall on 28 September, the National Pensioners' Day of Action.



Dianne Hancock and Anna Philpott in a scene from the 'Fifty Years Ago Show' (top) and joined by John Anton and Tom Austin for a musical number (below). Musical director Barry Wilmore is not in the pictures.

The members of the company have also compiled a fascinating record of life in the 1930s, with the same title *Fifty Years Ago*. Like the show itself, the large format book is compiled from the memories of people in the Greenwich area. Many of the fifty or so

illustrations have also been supplied by the contributors, and the typical advertisements and newspaper clippings add to the period flavour. It is available at £1.50, including postage, from Pam Schweitzer, 15 Camden Row, Blackheath, London SE3 0QA.