

EXTRA

MODERN LANGUAGES

Dramatic achievement

A joint Anglo-French musical provided the spur for students to improve their language skills. Mike Prestage reports

Boding thespians from schools in Bristol had a chance to enjoy the spotlight and improve their French language skills performing in an Anglo-French production of a specially written musical.

A joint Anglo-French company was formed to perform *Thorsilve*, billed as a philosophical allegory based on a traditional folk tale, with strong ecological overtones. The show will be played in both countries and in both languages with native speakers singing the lyrics in each language and a bilingual chorus.

Last month the piece was performed at the Redgrave Theatre, Bristol, with local students from Clifton College and Hancliffe School, and members of the Bristol Light Opera Chorus.

In all, around a dozen young people took part, but the language benefits stretch much wider. During the French performances school parties made up the bulk of the audience as language teachers took advantage of the opportunity.

Douglas Henderson, director of drama at Clifton College, says: "One of the most striking things was how quickly the French improved of all those taking part. Everything was put together in four days and people coped tremendously well."

The idea for *Thorsilve* came

'You have to get into the character and the context, and in French that can be difficult'

from the Micaëlo Theatre Company, a professional organisation which promotes youth drama in the Bordeaux area. Lyrics are by the director of Micaëlo, Marie-Cécile Lemaud, and music by the Paris-based composer Pierre-André Athane. Tony Correll, a former teacher at Clifton College and now a freelance writer, direc-

tor and stage designer did the translation.

Marie-Cécile Lemaud, a former English teacher in France, says: "As a former teacher I know the best way to learn a language is to make it pleasurable for those taking part. Most have learned a language at school but are afraid to use it. Yet once they're working on a production like this it all comes back to them."

She says the French actors wanted to work with people from another country to broaden their horizons. The English musicals were also held in high regard and it was a chance to work with professionals in this country.

Directing the production is British director Thomas de Maillet Burgess, whose *La Bohème* for English Touring Opera opened recently at Sadlers Wells. The sets and costumes were professionally designed and created; lighting and stage management were similarly produced by West End professionals.

Mr de Maillet Burgess says: "It has been a very interesting



Three little ghosts: Chrystelle Meyer, Tanya Porter and Odise Lambert as the Spirits in *Thorsilve*, inspired by the Micaëlo Theatre Company, which promotes youth drama in the Bordeaux area

experience. With Europe opening up sharing each other's culture through drama is terrific. There is also the chance to see how the French approach productions."

He says there was some fear about having two shows because of the comparison that might be made between them, but both nationalities have learned from each other. The mixed group of choristers has appeared as a whole and it is impossible to spot the nationality.

Tanya Porter, 16, from Bristol's St Paul's, had found problems with the language at first. She is studying German for GCSE, not

studying performing arts at a local college from September and wants to be an actress.

Bookings for the performances over the six days were good. School trips packed the French production, but Tanya's friends and relatives opted for the English version.

Mr Henderson says: "It has been a difficult production to put on and the logistics were something of a nightmare but the benefits have been enormous. Having made the contact and shown it is something that can be made to work, I would hope it is the sort of thing we will tackle again."