

As boys get their girls, so Brecht gets his Man

By JASON SHERMAN

Romeo and Juliet
by William Shakespeare
directed by Neil Freeman
Atkinson

Man Equals Man
by Bertolt Brecht
Hart House Theatre
until Saturday

Fool For Love
by Sam Shepard
directed by Michele George
currently at Toronto Free Theatre

The recent Metro productions of *Romeo and Juliet*, *Man Equals Man*, and *Fool For Love* provide three excellent opportunities to see performed the plays we often only manage to study at university.

Neil Freeman tried to get his fourth-year performance students to follow Hamlet's advice and speak the speeches as they were pronounced. The result was a *Romeo and Juliet* with generally strong performances. The no-tricks performance began with the actors stalking the stage in tights and gawking at the skulls placed randomly about the silver-gilt poles. From this moment on there was a feeling of

what we might call *oneness* not only amongst the actors, but between the audience and the ensemble.

While the pacing and textual cuts grabbed and maintained audience interest in, and awareness of, the storyline, Freeman's greatest accomplishment may have been his ability to turn nine student actors into one seemingly well-seasoned acting company. No thunder was stolen, and every actor was a welcome sight on stage, although John Weisberger was a touch more welcome, by virtue of his commanding voice and presence.

And speaking of Brechtian (self-conscious theatricality and all that) technique, the always reliable Graduate Centre at University of Toronto presented an early work of the German pioneer called (sometimes) *Man Equals Man*, the story of an individual's first taste of, and eventually his unquenchable thirst for, blood.

Alan Filewod kept the proceedings and the feel of the text manic and dreamlike, except for a very long and nearly unbearable train scene which threatened to make the audience forget what the play is about.

Unlike the York production, there were some standout performances, namely Barnaby Southgate who looks and acts, as his name

suggests he might, like a music-hall performer, and Craig Stephenson who portrays a stock character—the tough army major—like a stock character, letting the role work itself. Monica Prendergast sings verse a good deal better than she delivers prose, which is itself something of a feat given the not-too-inspired music of Jamie Crooks. His Motownish finale gets points for originality, but we get the feeling Brecht might be breakdancing in his grave.

There's no dancing or singing in *Fool for Love*, but actors Brent Carver and Jennifer Dale get to scream and roll around a whole lot. That new Great God of the American Theatre Sam Shepard has wrought a play around the seemingly tireless theme of life inventing art inventing life and so forth which is given expression here in the twisted stories woven by a possibly incestuous sister-brother duo and their off-to-the-wings father. By the end no one knows who's making up what and, just possibly, no one, including the audience, really cares. There just isn't enough going on to sustain even the hour and a half of the play, but at least cowboy Carver and groundskeeper Richard Donat make it fun. Carver is supposed to be something like this country's Great Star; if so, Donat may well be its Milky Way, because it is his show from the moment he appears, shucks and all.



From Bertolt Brecht's *Man Equals Man*.

Former York teacher and Shepard pen-pal Michele George directs a fast performance, demanding along the way a lot from her actors as they scream and crawl their way around and along the beautifully detailed motel bedroom. She gets what she seems to ask for, but we might wonder whether it might not have been put to better use.

Man Equals Man continues through Saturday night. *Fool For Love* is just off at the Theatre Upstairs at the Free Theatre.



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