

Innovative Mercury misses mark with *Messiah*

Messiah
by Martin Sherman
Mercury Theatre

By REBECCA KANN

In the past Mercury Theatre has built a reputation for producing innovative and topical plays, the most recent of which was their tremendously successful production of *Agnes of God*. Unfortunately, the same can't be said for their current effort, a rather mediocre rendering of Martin Sherman's *Messiah*.

At best, Sherman's *Messiah* is in places mildly amusing. At its worst, however, the perpetually uncomfortable scene changes, and the apparent struggle of the actors to maintain their interest in the onstage happenings make watching the play a chore for the audience.

And the script itself doesn't make the actors' job any easier. It practically denies any sort of relationship between the characters, while the constant repetition of thoughts and themes destroys any depth the actors may have derived from their roles. The whole thing seems particularly unfortunate given the potentially fascinating subject matter. The play deals with the concerns of a Polish Jewish community after a Cossack uprising in 1665; their desperate search, and subsequent discovery of the Messiah.

There are times when an actor, setpiece, or a snatch of music captures the imagination, but these moments are few and far between. For the most part, the audience's tendency is to hope for a startling revelation, or a striking insight. Unfortunately, none is forthcoming. By the end of the play interest has turned to disillusionment and boredom.



Maruska Starkova (l) and Susanah Hoffman in Mercury's production of *Messiah*. Effort is mediocre.

An all too important announcement.

Excalibur is looking for two serious-minded people to take over as Arts Editors of *Excalibur* next year. The present regime, which has in its quasi-fascist way ruled these pages with an iron fist, heeding the desperate cries of none but

themselves and their petty, narrow-minded viewpoints and amateurish criticism, is leaving. And so, in their place we need two people just as dedicated and just as versatile with the English language as any chimp 'round these parts. Come in now and ask for the present Arts Editors and they'll show you everything.

Dance pioneer visits York

By CASSANDRA KRIVY

Eleanor King last visited Toronto in 1935, when she danced at Eaton's. Fifty years later she returns as a guest lecturer for the York Dance Department. She gave a lecture/demonstration last Tuesday and held several classes.

King began her modern dance career at the age of 20 without benefit of previous dance training. King studied with Doris Humphrey and Charles Weidman in 1928, at a time when the two were separating themselves from the Devishawn School of Dance in New York City. Their aim was to create a new form of modern dance which would be expressive of their own times. "Dance is the most rewarding thing one could do," said King. "The whole self is involved and liberated."

King began travelling in Europe in 1952, then Asia in 1958. She danced in Korea, Japan, England and Holland.

Two Fulbright and Vogelstein travel grants were awarded King for her projects in the study of traditional dance and drama.

"We are much enriched if we know how the other side of the world is moving," said King, referring to the bridging of the gap between

East and West in dancing.

Her specialty is a form of modern dance that is highly developed in Korea, called Dionysus in Seoul. It is the earliest form of dance, relating man to the spirit world.

Aside from dance, King has other interests which include painting and writing. Her specialty in painting is Russian ink work. She has also written three books. Her first, entitled *Transformation*, is a memoir of the Humphrey-Weidman era. *Transformations to the West* consists of her own line drawings, and deals with Japanese dance. Her most recent book, not yet completed, is currently being considered for publication.

As a Pioneer of Modern Dance travelling and giving her lectures and demonstrations, King hopes to convey to audiences the message that anyone who "is physically able should dance." Her words to dancers are most emphatic: "believe in what you're doing. Be true to yourself," which she follows with the observation that most dancers "are eclectic (but they) can't help but be so in our culture." They must "learn to be single-minded and concentrate, exploring every avenue that is open to them, with a definite goal in mind," she says.

Contest: win free typesetting from us!

Excalibur, as part of its undying effort to stimulate student interest in campus activities, and to severely reduce its overstock of press review material, has devised a little contest which, if successful, will result in our meeting both these selfless aims.

The idea is the *Excalibur Arts Top Ten*, in which you the reader rank in descending order your 10 favorite arts events of the past scholastic year. The events can be performances by individuals, or groups; department-related,

college-related, or privately organized affairs; York artists and non-York artists. In short, any arts event goes.

What's in it for you? The first 15 ballots we receive will earn their authors a selection of one book or album from amongst our vast library. And all ballots will be eligible for the grand prize: one hour's free typesetting from *Excalibur*. Sound impressive? It is: you can get a professional-looking resume, chapter one of a book, or, hell, just 60 minutes of clean good fun with one of our typesetters.

ONLY ONE ENTRY PER PERSON PLEASE

My 10 favorite arts events of the past year have been:

- | | |
|----------|-----------|
| 1. _____ | 6. _____ |
| 2. _____ | 7. _____ |
| 3. _____ | 8. _____ |
| 4. _____ | 9. _____ |
| 5. _____ | 10. _____ |

Name: _____

Telephone Number: _____

Moby no theatre flop

By ALEX PATTERSON

Toronto's newest venue for live theatre, The Ritz on St. Clair West, played host to the city's newest troupe last Thursday, for the Canadian premiere of *Moby Dick*.

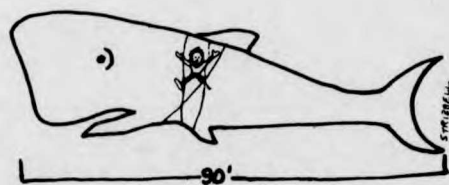
"Moby Dick on stage?" Incredible as it seems, Herman Melville's epic novel—longer than *Crime and Punishment* and twice as difficult to stage—was the choice for the gala opening. Director Steven Rumbelow and his young theatre company (named the Company Theatre in a moment of inspiration) are nothing if not ambitious. Rumbelow, a native of England, now settled here, also mounted Joyce's *Ulysses* for the stage a while back. This time, however, his ambition may have had the better of him. After all, apart from the book's length and Melville's endless digressions and moralizing, *what about the whale?*

The great white whale, we are told, can achieve a length of 90 feet. An actor with a tape measure demonstrates; it reaches from the footlights to the rear of the auditorium. We are duly impressed, both by the magnitude and the director's imagination. Other attempts to convey the size of the whale, however, are not quite so effective. And what Gore Vidal called "the windy obscurity" of Melville's writing seems to bog down the production still further.

Melville himself is a character in the play, portrayed by actor James Tait as excessively flamboyant, possibly insane. The author manipulates Ishmael's arms like a puppeteer, lip-synchs his lines, and reappears several times throughout the production in various guises. Other devices include interspersing fragments of the novel with seafaring ditties, a huge black styrofoam penis (sperm whale, get it?) and mime, dance, and dream sequences. A harpoon drops from the rafters and pierces the floorboards in one of the evening's truly thrilling moments; but then there is also an

Indian suspended high above the front rows by a wire, a music hall comedian and a lot of "friggin' around in the riggin'" by the Pequod's crew. In the end, it all becomes a bit too much to take; one sits wondering if the next scene will bring Captain Ahab onstage carrying the kitchen sink.

Ahab, played by David Fox, is one of the best things in the show. As he lurches around the ship on his peg leg, he seems possessed, convincing us that he *is* as he describes himself, "not mad but demonic." His suicide is the theatrical zenith of the night. For a moment, all the production's excesses are forgiven; for once we are stunned for the right reasons.



Another standout in the cast is David Calderisi as Father Mapple, the Pequod's chaplain. His sermon on sin and repentance, delivered from the crow's nest, was played for laughs. Calderisi managed to bring out the absurdity of some of Melville's logic, without making an outright mockery of it. The crow's nest/pulpit shows the versatility of the rather Spartan set; the sketchy decks of the ship also double as the Massachusetts town where the story begins.

The Company Theatre have begun their inaugural season with a production which, while less than completely satisfying, is adventurous and marks them as worth watching out for.