

Exceptional play from young writer

McAnuff's Lime bristles with bitter conflict

By BOB McBRYDE

A Lime In The Morning, now playing at the Toronto Centre For The Arts, is an exceptional play which is given expert treatment by the Actor's Theatre troupe under the direction of Alex Dmitriev.

Its author, Des McAnuff, is a Toronto playwright with two successful works to his credit. His art, as exemplified by A Lime In The Morning, is characterized by a mature ear for dialogue, an ability to develop disparate characters through a presentation of contrasting speech patterns, and a knack for portraying that dramatic conflict which bursts from amidst static absurdity. The playwright is 21 years old.

Now, for a talent like McAnuff's to blossom at such an early age not only drives a parasitic reviewer of like years into fits of envy, but also brooks well for the Toronto, and for the Canadian theatre scene in the years ahead.

What is especially encouraging about A Lime In The Morning is that the playwright has forged a many-

sided work which gains its depth through an exploration of the subtle implications of a relatively simple situation. It is a play which combines novel particulars with elements of the universal. The audience is neither assaulted with shrill didacticism nor allowed to retain a distinct complacency.

POWER STRUGGLE

The crux of the play's surface action revolves around a struggle for power between two transients, Mica Blake, played by Bob Dermer, and The Referee, played by Richard Fitzpatrick. Mica's sewer refuge is invaded by the bizarre Referee whose enclave in the park is threatened by the approach of winter. The Referee employs psychological games and finally brute physical strength to conquer his older victim.

Each character has a set of values and beliefs which structures his conception of reality, some of which they share but many of which are

totally different. The Referee, by imposing his rules upon Mica Blake, shatters the old man's life structure in a cruel ritual of destruction; each becomes a victim, and a victor.

As the Referee whistles dead Mica's "fantasy" framework, the old man affirms its necessarily illusory quality. The Referee, as Pyrrhic conqueror, is ready to live his own, more sadistic fantasy, and the ritual begins again.

McAnuff's play echoes Harold Pinter's exploitation of the dramatic conflict inherent in an invasion, as well as the British playwright's use of wandering dialogue delivered at cross purposes.

The Toronto artist's work, like that of both Pinter and Albee, also unsettles the audience in that we are unable to verify the truth of what the characters say: the line between "truth" and "fantasy" is sufficiently blurred as to become meaningless. Indeed, what is true becomes a question of what we believe to be true; this "truth" applying to both an in-

dividual and to a society.

To compare McAnuff to either Pinter or Albee is probably foolhardy. But the ritual rhythms and the techniques are there, as Lime In The Morning becomes a paradigm for the universal situation of the conqueror and the conquered, the imposer and the imposed upon.

The Actor's Theatre production offers not only a brilliant new play, but also a pair of fine performances enacted upon a faultlessly conceived

set, a suitable sleazy sewer. Bob Dermer, as Mica Blake, deserves special mention for sustaining, in an authentic Newfoundland accent, a role which demands that in turn he weep, dance and puke with endearing energy. Richard Fitzpatrick, though excellent as the Referee, must take a backseat to Dermer's sterling performance.

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