

Italian Colombaionis "fool" around for laughs

By ALEX PATTERSON

Called "the Clowns of Fellini" for their appearances in two of the master's films, *I Colombaioni* are a pair of jesters/acrobats in the grand style of Italian *commedia dell'arte*. This week, these two world-class Fools are making their Toronto premiere at the Ryerson Theatre until February 9.

Though they wear no greasepaint or bulbous red noses, these present-day Pagliaccis are firmly rooted in the traditions of tomfoolery which originated in the Medieval marketplace; travelling players who would turn up in a town on market day to prance about, putting on dumbshows, etc. for donations from the peasantry. The Colombaionis are rather ordinary-looking middle-aged men, Carlo and Alberto by name, who wear blue business suits and happen to be brothers-in-law. They make their living flying from city to city and acting like extremely agile imbeciles, much to the delight of audiences on several continents. No subtitles are provided, nor are

any needed, for though *I Colombaioni* speak very little English, they can communicate volumes through the desperate Esperanto of body language.

In the first few minutes of their act, Alberto, blindfolded, unicycles his way into the orchestra pit (almost), then, with his relative, proceeds to perform some of their more famous routines, such as send-ups of the William Tell legend, a "Lasagna Western" and the great Shakespearean tragedy "Omlette." In this, the troubled young prince inexplicably decides to deliver his lines to the "king" (crowned with a spaghetti strainer) with a mouthful of water. For those who've always wanted to know just how much water can be crammed into the human mouth, *I Colombaioni* is a must-see.

The high point came in the second half of the evening, when this comedic *cosa nostra* recruited two men and a woman from the audience for an impromptu rendition of the opera *Cavalleria Rusticana*. These poor unsuspecting souls were coerced into singing that melodramatic style which *bel canto* opera

demands in front of hundreds of spectators, after receiving instructions exclusively in Italian. The three acquitted themselves admirably, and scored a big hit with *il pubblico*.

Other skills fared less well. Their much-ballyhooed homage to *Waiting For Godot* was a major disappointment. Consisting almost entirely of the two of them standing motionless with faces frozen into an expression of horror and gormlessness, it was the most static vignette on the programme and *molto* tiresome. Several of the segments suffered from excessive introductions and the relentless mugging, bungling and buffoonery wears thin after a while. Another schtick which fell short of the mark was the one in which Carlo, sporting a greatcoat and a gasmask, sat in a fallout shelter "the day after" preparing himself a cup of tea. As mime, it was well done; he silently showed us what he was doing. Unfortunately, what he was doing wasn't very interesting.

This was the only time when the team's collaborations with the satirical playwright Dario Fo (*We Can't Pay, We Won't Pay!*; *Accidental*

Death of an Anarchist) was in evidence. Fo, who is barred from the United States for his alleged communist sympathies, is known for his biting social commentary, something which is conspicuously absent in this show.

Even during their weaker material, however, the Colombaionis are always watchable, in the way that a blender would be if it were stuffed with 500 years of European culture and set to PUREE. Despite occasional *longueurs*, the prattling and the pratfalls, the Colombaioni boys are *virtuosi* at their craft, and theirs is a craft worth preserving. They are masters at sleight of hand, foot and other body parts, and possess that rare talent of appearing spontaneous even when performing stunts which might prove fatal had they not been rehearsed to death.



An individual's sense of humor is as personal as their fingerprints. For this reason, *I Colombaioni* is one of those shows which almost defy criticism. Portions of the audience laughed heartily throughout; others only intermittently, still others, not at all. If your taste for things comic tends more towards visual humor rather than the verbal, then this mélange of sight gags, slapstick, black-out sketches and general farce-ing around. Might must be the thing to dislocate your funnybone.

Wired Society fuses electronics and music



By PETER ZAPARINUK

The *Wired Society* held its final performance of electronic and acoustic music on Saturday, February 1. Despite poor weather conditions, the concert drew a well-sized crowd to the Music Gallery on Queen St. West, where the four-day festival had been taking place. The festival featured noon concerts followed by lecture-demonstrations during the day, with a concert every evening.

The Saturday evening program consisted of a broad selection of pieces: "Petit Musique Sentimentale" by Yvs Daoust, "Solar Ellipse" by Barry Truasc, "RSRCH 4/83" by Peter Hanna, "Psalm" by Larry Lake, "Overture" by Kristi Allik/Bentley Jarvis and "Out" by Alain Thibault.

Electronic music is a genre that has been developing since the middle

part of the century. Composers have been experimenting with a vast new field of musical sounds created by computers and synthesizers.

The pieces in the concert featured diverse uses of the various electronic and acoustic instruments. The Daoust, Wherry, Hannan and Lake pieces all incorporated traditional acoustic instruments with electronically generated sound in different ways.

The Daoust piece was structured as a dream using a dancer as the visual image with a solo woodwind instrument and a gong accompanied by an electronic backdrop. "Psalm" by Larry Lake used a solo oboe playing a meditative melodic line with a similar, constant electronic background.

The Truac, Allik/Jarvis, and Thibault pieces used only electronic systems in their musical settings. These pieces were also notable for their thicker textures made by layering different levels of sound. Truac's "Solar Ellipse" used elliptical sound patterns orbiting a constant centre.

As diverse as some of these pieces were, there were still some common factors in all of them. The melodic and harmonic structures were basically diatonic; the intervals were widely spaced and open sounding. This is part of a trend that has developed in recent years as a reaction to the extreme chromaticism used in the earlier part of the century. All of the pieces incorporated varying degrees of minimalism, that is they used certain ideas of systems repeatedly.

The *Wired Society* presented the public which some of the latest work in this field. The combination of acoustic and electronic music is important in bridging the gap between the two different mediums of sound.

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