

Play captures audience

by Stephen R. Mills

Last week DMDS gave seven performances of "You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown!", the musical based on Charles Shultz' "Peanuts" comic strip. The Society handled the production well but somehow the whole enterprise failed. The fault, I think, lies with the play itself as I could see no drastic mistakes by the director, the performers or the technical crew.

There were weaknesses — a bit of overacting on everyone's part, the failures to use the

stage properly, the grotesque make-up on Snoopy, but the enthusiasm of the cast, resulting in some nicely delivered lines, movements and songs, negated these slips.

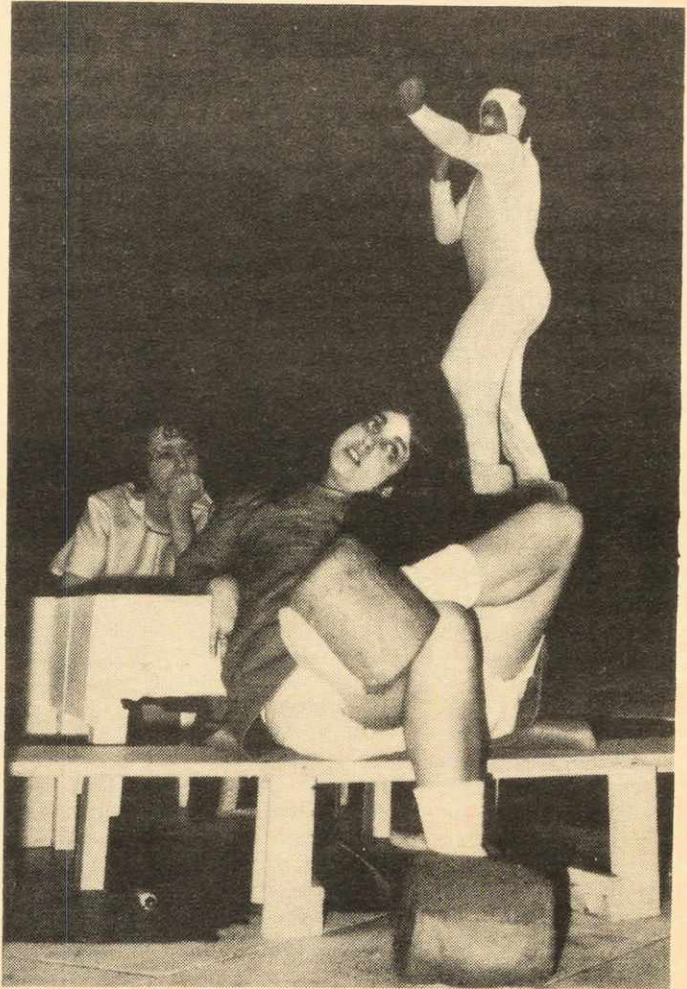
The play appears to be a failure to mix mediums. Shultz succeeds with his strip because he uses this basic static visual medium to provoke laughter, then thought, then, hopefully, change. A comic strip, like a cartoon or a book, is permanent. You can go back and re-read it, thereby catching new meanings all the time.

Perhaps the most important fact is that a permanent medium (visual or auditory) is serious. Of course its effectiveness depends on the artistic competence of the creator, but it always demands thought.

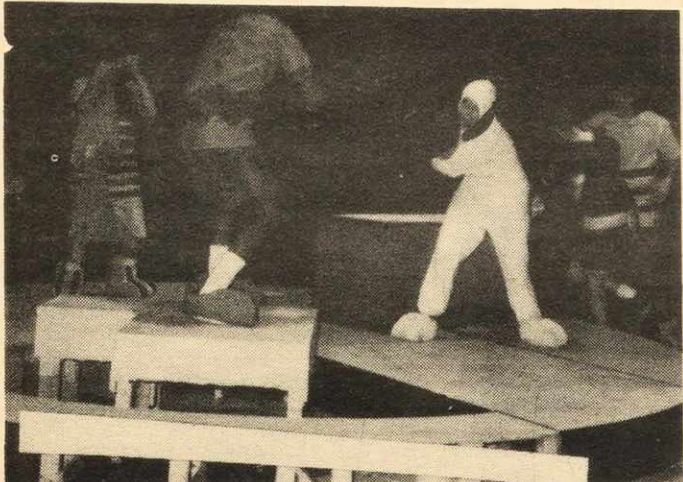
Shultz understands that he can use the humorous motif — children burdened with the psychological hang-ups of adults and expressing them in childish ways — to catch his readers' attention and then make his point.

This is impossible in a musical since a musical's sole purpose is to entertain. Shultz's humour comes through. The sketches catch the audience attention, makes them laugh, but then leaves them cold. They can only go back in memory and they find nothing because all facial expressions, dynamic positionings, have been lost in the music and the motion.

"You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown!" is not valueless; it is entertaining when well done (and DMDS did a fine job) but it does not, and cannot, approach the genius found in "Peanuts".



Three members of "Charlie Brown" cast. In foreground is Pam Mazer as Lucy.



peter newbold/ dal photo

Scene from "You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown!".

Pier 1 performing two plays

by Walter Plaut

Pier 1 is now performing two one-act plays: "The Resurrection of Philip Jerome Michaels, or How Can I Rest in Peace?" and "Seal". "Seal" appears second, contrary to the order in the program and on posters.

"The Resurrection of Philip Jerome Michaels", an imaginative hour-long play written and directed by John Culjak, is excellently performed by actors Bob Reid (as the Mortician) and Bill Gran-chelli (as the resurrected "P.J.").

The play reminds us of stories in which someone has made a pact with the Devil. Here, it is P.J. who has signed a contract with a mad mortician to help P.J. end his miserable life.

The scene is an embalming room. P.J. is prone — or is it supine? — on a foam-rubber

slab. He is wearing only the pants from a set of long underwear, and his massive body indeed appears deceased. The Mortician, slim and satanic, wears the traditional black suit. In fact, when P.J. awakes, he dubs him "Blacksuit".

There is humour and well-done action, including a bit where the Mortician catches imaginary flowers showering down at P.J.'s funeral. The ending is decisive.

"Seal", a shorter play with many more characters, is a poor second, although it does contain some laughs. It has been greatly shortened from its original radio-play length, and so does not drag in spite of the stiff acting and stereotyped characters.

The setting is a Newfoundland family, and a strange family it is, although we can recognize

the family members as familiar types: a young aspiring politician, an old maid, an evangelical brother, a tavern owner, a long-suffering wife, and a delirious old sealhunter (hence the play's title) whose ne'er-do-well son encourages him in his fantasies and supplies him with rum.

It is clear that something is wrong with the play when it

ends: the audience is not sure whether it is over or there is another scene to come.

In spite of its problems, "Seal" does have some dramatic moments. The most exciting scene occurs when the lights go out during a storm. The living room chaos is heightened when we cannot see it, and only hear the voices and movements.

The plays, in intimate theatre-in-the-round, are certainly worth the student price of \$1.50. The production runs January 26-30 and February 2-6, 9-13, and 16-20. Tickets are available at the Dal Central Box Office. You'll find the Pier 1 Theatre at 2162 Upper Water Street.

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