

# The Gateway fine arts

## walterdale anouilh: no ennui

The current production at the Walterdale Playhouse, Jean Anouilh's "Waltz of the Toreadors," often becomes a bewildering mixture of highly stylized comedy and melodramatic farce.

Despite the conflicting impressions of the group's goals left by the production, the play is not at all unpleasant. Indeed, it is one of that small group of plays which can evoke truly uninhibited laughter in an audience.

Fortunately for the Walterdale group, the innate excellence of Anouilh's risqué dialogue makes the ruination of the production impossible.

Wes Stefan, as General St. Pe, provides most of the confusion of styles. His early scenes tend to be both weak and pathetic, especially when he is left alone on the stage to soliloquize. When he is bullying, capitulating to, and loving, his wife, his characterization becomes much stronger.

Mary Glenfield as the plaintive, dominating Mme. St. Pe is an excellent foil for him. The scenes between them often achieve a high level of sophisticated comedy.

Unfortunately, these scenes have been imbued by Anouilh with a strong pathos also. The pathos results from the meaninglessness of the marriage, a meaninglessness which these two performances seldom take into account.

This lack of deeper meaning reveals itself early in the play in the General's scene opposite Dr. Benfant (Jack Wilson), and, more particularly, in the husband-wife strangulation scene.

This latter scene contains nothing funny, yet the manner in which the previous scenes are presented leaves the audience with no recourse but laughter during it. Which is wrong, entirely wrong.

The plot becomes complicated with the appearance of St. Pe's secretary (Rowland McMaster) and his faithful-for-17-years (and chaste) lover (Renee Cohen).

Neither portrays his character with any real depth, although by their very lack of depth, they both manage to approach the very formalized acting style I would like to see employed in this play.

Both bring a freshness to their roles which seems possible only to those possessing a rather unprofessional naivete.

Miss Cohen especially has a fine comic sense, particularly with an audience at close range. Nothing can compare with the manner in which she peers cross-eyed down at the pistol so dramatically pointed at her breast in her "suicide" scene.

Eventually, a deus ex machina in the form of Father Ambrose (Paul Swartz) straightens out the complicated mess.

The General reluctantly consents to let his secretary (whom Father Ambrose reveals as the General's son) marry his lover. The lady being some fifteen years older than her intended, the meaninglessness of the marriages becomes further compounded.

Unfortunately, the cast plays all

this for laughs, completely ignoring the deeper pathos.

It is only in the final scene in the which the General initiates a new affair with yet another of Mme. St. Pe's maids (Susan Smith and Karen Raby play the pert maids) that Stefan realizes some of this pathos.

Special mention must be made of Pam Boyd and Dianne Couves who played the General's two ugly daughters. They displayed great ingenuity in their roles and certainly provided most of the really genuine laughs of the evening. Miss Couves especially has a fine sense of comic timing.

Alice Poeley's direction permitted each actor a good deal of freedom in the interpretation of his role. This was perhaps the cause of the too-slow pace and the stylistic confusion of the production.

I think it was probably also the cause of the lightness and enthusiasm which ultimately made the production a success.

—Shirley Neuman

## saying it in french at studio

With a minimum of sets, costumes, and lighting, and a maximum of energy, style, and technique, Les Jeunes Comédiens romped through a delightful presentation of "Lecons D'Amour" by Molière, in French.

This very refreshing and unique performance took place last Friday and Saturday nights at Studio Theatre.

The production, which was actually a collection of scenes with interludes of song and dance, was done on a bare stage with four imaginatively-designed movable screens. The shifting of these screens between each scene was worked into modern dance routines, resulting in a smooth and exciting show with rarely a dull moment.

The one or two places where I was not completely involved were merely the result of the fact that I do not speak French; and at times the comedy depended on the words.

However, most of the scenes were clearly understandable and very amusing, due to the wonderful mime technique that was integrated with the dialogue. These young actors and actresses had routines that even Charlie Chaplin would have a hard time topping.

They closed the evening with some beautiful singing and classical dance; all of which serves to remind one that an actor in the truest sense must be a master of many arts.

Les Jeunes Comédiens were just that. And the audience paid them the respect that is due such a talented group, with a tremendous ovation and even cries of "Encore!"

I was fortunate enough to be at a party, after the Saturday show, with five members of the company; and I found it very interesting to talk to actors with such a different cultural background.

I was particularly surprised to find that the French-Canadian theatre is really not that different from the English-Canadian; it is definitely not the rustic sort of "folk theatre" that many here in



—Laddie Ponich photo

their ignorance may think exists in Quebec.

There may be a difference in style and language, but people in the theatre seem to be very much akin no matter where or who they are. Actors, it seems, have something in common regardless of social or cultural differences.

One of the actors was telling me about the trouble finding theatre work in Montreal, the problems with unions and wages, his hopes to find summer stock work in the Laurentians or television work in the city.

An extremely beautiful and enchanting young lady from the group was saying how she wanted to act O'Neill, Williams and Miller, something with depth, as opposed to the superficial farces of Molière.

And we all danced on into the night with the music of the Beatles, and laughed at each other's anecdotes about the theatre, and really had a marvelous and enlightening time.

As the party was in full swing, this same adorable beautiful girl said to me, "It is so sad." I rather uncomprehendingly asked her why, and she replied that they were having such a happy time that they would be all the more lonely when they left Edmonton and continued the tour.

I think we all felt the same towards them.

—Robert Mumford

## filmsoc: two from the orient

The Edmonton Film Society has presented viewers with samples of very good and very dull Asian film-making during past weeks.

"Jalsaghar," or "The Music Room," from India, shown in the Main Series Feb. 21, must fall into the latter category, its merits unable to compensate for its defects.

That the film has good features is undeniable; we are reminded that the film was made by Satyajit Ray, the director responsible for the famous "Pather Panchali Trilogy."

Consider the treatment of environment. The camera presents, for example, not only the Indian Plain, but the aridity of the surroundings of the Huzzar's mansion. Eroded bank and encroaching water express the vanishing

**SYMPHONY SOLOIST**—Broderick Olson will perform Beethoven's Violin Concerto Op. 61 with the University Symphony at their concert in Con Hall, 8:30 p.m. March 15. Other works on the program will include Four Scottish Dances (Arnold), the Leonora Overture No. 3 (Beethoven), Sabre Dance (Khachaturian), and Circus Polka (Stravinsky).

grandeur of the Huzzar's circumstances more effectively than words. The mansion itself is portrayed not so much as elegant as an empty, sterile, mausoleum.

Also praiseworthy is the manner in which Ray presents the conflict between the Huzzar's aristocratic pretensions and his actual circumstances.

The main device is music; in conflict always with the penury of his economic situation, it symbolizes his highborn aspirations. But the conflict is reflected in other ways as well, for example in the Huzzar's relationship to his two servants.

One guards the safe with its declining resources; the other, oblivious of such matters, epitomizes the master's love of splendor and music.

Yet defects, none of which alone would vitiate, in concert, render the film less than successful.

The situation of pauper-nobleman confronted by brash nouveau-hiche is old. Little is done to take either character beyond the stereotype.

Nor does the plot manage to sustain either interest or contribute much to development of the basic conflict. For example, considered in the scope of the film as a whole, the time devoted to the trip and death of son and wife seem unjustifiable.

The same might be said of the use of music.

If the desired effect was the Huzzar's infatuation with music, one wonders why the director did not barrage the audience with short excerpts from numerous concerts rather than long sessions on two or three widely separated occasions.

The impression left by Ray's method—few performances, each of considerable length—is that the film was created as a setting for Indian music, rather than music as a means of symbolizing the film's basic conflict.

Hackneyed situation. Long sequences contributing little new to either character or basic plot. The combination, despite Ray's sensitive camera, makes "Jalsaghar," at least during its first two-thirds, a slow-moving, often ineffective film.

"Rashomon," on the other hand, presented a week later at the Classic Series, is one of the best films the east has produced.

If "Jalsaghar" may be called a study of the ego of an aristocrat, "Rashomon" qualifies as a study of the common man's egoism.

One event—the encounter of a bandit with a man travelling with his bride—is told in four different ways by four different people.

Each account differs from the others in that it preserves and strengthens what is essential, deletes what is detrimental, to the speaker's self-image.

Even the woodcutter, whose version painted all three participants as equally black anti-heroes, is not presenting the truth, but defending his own sceptical view of man.

The fact that we are individuals with individual egos and prejudices, Kurosawa is saying, means that truth is necessarily subjectively relative.

The actual scenes of the encounter are inserted first into the frame of a conversation between three men at the Rasho gate, and secondarily into the scenes where the witnesses presented testimony. The transition required is effected by an unusually effective combination of realistic and abstract presentation.

Scenes at the gate and in the forest are realistic; they are separated by shots in abstract of the narrator against a plain background disturbed only by the distant figures of previous witnesses.

Photography and acting too are superb. Individual roles vary from version to version of the basic episode, subtle adaptations corresponding to the point of view of the respective narrators.

Acting and photography reveal the careful attention to detail and relation of one sequence to another that the montage, or construction, of the film as a whole manifests.

One criticism may, however, be made. Even taking into consideration that "Rashomon" is an "intellectual's film" designed for the masses, one wonders whether the moral need have been drawn so carefully and repeated so tediously at the end of the film.

The final sequence with the baby, although it makes its moral point, doesn't "come off" dramatically. Part of the fun of seeing an "intellectual" film, it is suggested, should be being left to draw some of the conclusions for oneself.

—Beverley Gietz