

## How the Other Half Loves

John Neville's production of Alan Ayckbourn's *How the Other Half Loves* is a joy to behold. The play has a gimmick but it does not have to depend on this to keep the comedy rolling, rather it establishes a frame of reference from the beginning which is readily accepted as a convention.

Ayckbourn has contrived to have two family living rooms on stage at the same time. They are interwoven in such a manner that they reflect the adulterous threads that bind the two couples together. In this way we are able to follow simultaneously the diverse disasters and suspicions which threaten to sever the relationships emotionally if not geographically.

The story although confusing in print is brilliantly carried off on stage. The Fosters and the Phillips share the stage with equal trepidation. Fiona Foster has decided to take a brief fling with Bob Phillips but some insistent questioning by Frank Foster and Teresa Phillips compels both of them to invent a fictitious story involving an innocent couple, the William and Mary Featherstones. The thrust of the fiction is that Fiona spent the evening with Mary commiserating with her about William's adultery and Bob spent the evening with William commiserating about Mary's adulterous escapades.

Both Teresa Phillips and Frank Foster decide to interfere in the Featherstone's affairs and try to patch things up over successive dinner engagements. Teresa finally latches on that her husband has been philandering with Fiona Foster but Frank Foster remains in the dark. In the process of sorting the accusations out innocent Mary Featherstone is caught in a compromising situation with Bob Phillips and both incur William's wrath. This ultimate confusion acquires some acute revelations before the situation is resolved. Each finally goes their way unpunished and not necessarily repentant.

Misunderstanding is the driving force of this play and Mr. Neville succeeds exceptionally well in revealing these with understanding clarity which preserves the necessary irony with impeccable ease. His direction is deft and sharp. He manages to be clever without being coy and trying to maximize the effect of the dual setting. By placing his emphasis on the refreshingly casual wit of the script and the ingeniousness of the gimmick he has let Ayckbourn's material work to its own great advantage.

Mr. Neville is able to do this in part because of the sterling cast he has assembled. As Frank Foster, Nigel Hawthorne made a triumph out of diffidence. Understatement is the man's forte. He plays on it with exceptional skill until it becomes a style in itself. It is the perfect portrait of an English Babbit somewhat befuddled but clamly assured of his undeniable superiority and authority to muddle through.

Elva Mai Hoover was a particularly refreshing presence as Fiona Foster. It is an unusual part in that it is both contemporary and important. Good parts for women are few and far between these days. Miss Hoover made the most of her opportunities and appeared as a full blown character. The suburban housewife is a ticklish trap embroidered with clichés that are hard to avoid. Miss Hoover was very much her own woman and declared her presence with a rich voice,

and fine comic touch.

David Schurmann has a casual approach to Bob Phillips which was just right. Hardly exciting but an appropriate down to earth appraisal of the adulterous man with a sloppy wife. Eve Crawford, a little out of her league as the spouse, Teresa Phillips; a bit too brash and lacking in the depth that marked the other characters. It was not a disturbing lack but rather an annoying one.

Colin Miller and Margaret Bard as the beleaguered Featherstones were suitably confused although they had to rely on some rather clichéd responses to the contrived situations. Much of the fault for this I believe lies in the fact that they were strangers in both living rooms and didn't have a chance to reveal themselves until the resolution of their dilemma was effected. Miller was diminutive as the cross-legged nit and unconvincing as the supposed cuckold. Margaret Bard as Mary had an enormous range to cover from mouse to lion. It was a transition that was not encompassed with ease or believability although the author's intentions were brought into full play. Both Miller and Bard served both

script and director well while placing themselves unflatteringly in the light of believability.

Phil Silvers has returned to his customary adequate set designs. Granted he was abounding under the dictates of an all powerful gimmick but one cannot help but feel that he has given his imagination short shrift. The stage worked remarkably well but it was all drab except for its clever concept.

Mr. Neville has a divided hit on his hands. *How the Other Half Loves* would be fun even without the simultaneous staging gimmick. The plot complications are worthy of Feydeau and the humour is marvellously preserved by a discerning cast that works well together. Timing is all important in this play and this production is a fine example of the artistic force of good timing, both of movement and speaking. The timing keeps this mechanism ticking with steady precision. It allows the play to work for itself without relying on burlesque or exaggeration to make its points.

There may be the odd set left for the rest of the run. Go and have a laugh.

Walter Plinge

## One-act play festival

The SU Theatre and the Alberta Drama Festival have joined forces to present the Annual Alberta One-Act Drama Festival this year in the SUB Theatre on Sunday February 17, starting at 1:00 p.m.

The enterprise will get underway at one p.m. with Isabelle Foord's *A Dream of Sky People*. The play is an original story, by an Edmonton author, on how the world began. The Sky People, Nacha and Nazabo are instructed to leave their home and journey to the earth below, an earth stricken with evil and fear. Stage 6's production of *A Dream of Sky People* is the story of their struggle to build a home in this strange new world.

The cast under the direction of Gerri Peterson includes: Dauerl Neve as the Storyteller and Spider Lady, Gerri Peterson as Nacha, Blair Collins as Nazabo, David Sereda as the Raven and the Lynx and Neil Ford as Caribou and Grizzly.

*The Games Mistress* is another original. Jena Synder's play will be directed by Gerry Zelinski and presented by the

Troupe Players who consist of Jena Synder, John Devlin, Ron Yakimchuk, Sally Trofaenko, John George and Sam Jacobson.

The final play will be an anonymous play entitled simply, *Lemonade*, a two character piece that will feature May Glenfield and Doreen Ihsen. Kieth Digby is doing the direction for Prestige Productions.

Adjudicator for the Festival will be Ray Phipps who is the Drama supervisor for the Edmonton School Board.

The winner of this regional festival will represent the Edmonton Zone at the Alberta finals to be held in Banff from March 1 to March 3.

Tickets are now on sale at the Students' Union Box Office for a paltry \$1.50 for students or \$2.00 for non-students.

The committee for the festival which has put in so much hard work to make the festival a success includes Chairman Bob Fix, Bill Malmo, Jean Graham and Vern Torstensen.

## Thesis theatre in Studio

Studio Theatre is housing a graduate thesis production this weekend. Don Bousek has chosen Peter Handke's *Self Accusation* as the second of three productions for his degree requirements.

Bousek revealed that he is taking a multi-media approach to this avant-garde, German absurdist drama. This will represent a considerable change of pace from his earlier production of Edward Bond's *Saved* which was the first of his play selections.

*Self Accusation* will be presented both Saturday and Sunday, February 16 and 17 in Studio Theatre's home in Corbett Hall at 8:30 p.m. Running time on the play is short, approximately half an hour.

Admission is free and tickets may be picked up in advance at the Drama

Department's offices in the New Fine Arts Building in room 3-142 or at the door.

It's worth taking a look at. Normally thesis productions are hidden away from the general public and this is unfortunate as they sometimes are excellent productions. Occasionally they are embarrassments but they are always played with enthusiasm and vitality. It isn't easy to learn how to direct and it's impossible to become a sensitive director without the benefit of audience feedback. One can help to shape theatrical forms by just being a part of the audience so attending isn't just a passive act it is an active role. Good theatre doesn't just happen. It has to be forced to grow to meet demands. Go and see what's happening with the new crop of directors.



## ORACLES

### theatre lives

*How the Other Half Loves* by Alan Ayckbourn and directed by John Neville is off and running at the Citadel. It's a fine show with an outstanding performance by Nigel Hawthorne. Tickets are hard to get so start trying now.

*The Fantasticks* directed by Peter Feldman at the Walterdale Playhouse. Saturday, February 9 till 16. Curtain at 8:30. Tickets are available at the Bay for \$2.50 except Friday and Saturday when they are \$3.00. Address is 11407-107 St. You'll have to scramble for tickets as the seats are few and far between.

*The Country Wife* by Wycherley, directed by John Terfloth, February 6 till 16. In the new thrust theatre in the Fine Arts Building. A restoration farce of zest and high theatre. University students are admitted free if you can get a ticket from Room 3-146. Nightly at 8:30.

Theatre 3 will open its bill of two Canadian one-acts on February 20. *Sylvia* by James Osborne and *Dismissal Leading to Lustfulness* by Tom Whyte will run until March 3. Direction is by Mark Schoenberg and Keg Agrell-Smith. Tickets are available from Theatre 3 or the McCauley Plaza Box Office - telephone 422-4411.

*Self Accusation* by Peter Handke. A short one-act directed by Don Bouzek at Studio Theatre. Saturday and Sunday at 8:30 p.m. Admission is free as this is part of the requirements for an MFA in directing.

### easy on the ears

Tribe, a rock band from Toronto will be playing a free concert in SUB at noon Friday. Sort of an enticement to get people out to vote.

There will be a Brass Quintet Concert on Friday, February 15 at 11:00 a.m. in the Galleria of the Rutherford Library.

Saturday, February 16 Humphrey and the Dumptrucks will be playing a concert at 9:00 p.m. in Dinwoodie. Tickets are \$2.00 from the SUB Ticket Office or at the door. It's bound to be a large crowd.

Sunday, February 17 the staff and students of the Department of Music will be presenting another of their free concerts in the Exploration series in Con Hall at 8:00 p.m.

Dave Wright, one of the few remaining folksingers from the '60's has been lured out of retirement to play a concert for the Edmonton Folk Club at Gameau United Church (84th Ave., 112th Street) this Sunday night (Feb. 17th). Dave was one of the first acoustic musicians to ever play at a Rock Festival; his performance in 1970 at the Kinsmen Field House, as the middle act between two rock groups was described by a Gateway reviewer as 'the highlight of the evening'. Classical-folk-etc. guitarist Allen Bell will be the backup act. Admission is \$1.25. Edmonton Folk Club members, 50 cents. Starts around 8:00 p.m.

Wednesday February 20 Fleetwood Mac will be playing a concert at the Kinsmen Fieldhouse with Status Quo and Nazareth at 8:00 p.m. Tickets are available from Mike's.

Bruce Cockburn has been signed for a concert in SUB Theatre on March 10. Arrangements have been made through the Students' Union and the SU Record store in HUB. Tickets are \$3.00 and available from SU Records in HUB or the SUB Ticket Office.

### poetry reading

Friday February 22, Canadian poet, Dale Zieroth will read from his works. At the Centennial Library.

### for the eyes

University Art Gallery and Museum, Feb. 3-28, 1974. 1. Don Mabie and Wendy Toogood - Quilts and Drawings. 2. Jacques Hnizdovsky - an exhibition of thirty woodcuts by the Ukrainian master printmaker. The University Art Gallery is located directly south of the Faculty Club on campus, just off Saskatchewan Drive.

Latitude 53 is presenting the works of fourteen artists from Calgary. February 1-15. Paintings, prints and ceramics.