

Interdit au Public

Interdit au Public welcomes the public to good comedy, despite its title. The latest production of the Theatre Francaise d'Edmonton is a witty expose of the behind-the-scenes mayhem surrounding a new production.

The play concerns Herve Montagne, playwright-entrepreneur extraordinaire, and his new play on Napoleon and Josephine, with suitable references to Charles de Gaulle and other politicians. Herve believes that he fulfills the grand tradition of French comedy handed down from Moliere. The farce which the audience enjoys

is not far from that tradition.

Herve loses his first choice for the role of Josephine when the actress informs him that she is pregnant. Immediately, Nicole, the brassy and talentless stage manager's wife, demands the role. To keep peace, Herve promises her the role while he calls in his ex-wife to take the part. The plot rapidly complicates itself as the ex-wife, Gabrielle, brings her present husband Jean to play Napoleon and Herve chases his son's girlfriend Francoise while his present wife Gisele looks on in bemused pity with Robert the Stage Manager and Christian the

stage hand.

The farce is a lively but never cruel satire both of the characters themselves and of life in the theatre. Most of these characters make the everyday world their theatre where they may play out their fantasies. Christian is aware of this deception; he subtly controls what he can and avoids whatever is unimportant. Jean Johnson, in this supporting role, is very good. He projects that mischievous charm which enables his character to get away with so much. He is thoroughly enjoyable.

The only other character who remains aloof to the theatrics is Gisele. Her threat to leave Herve appears as a respite of sanity in the midst of chaos. This character helps to control the steam-rolling comedy else the play would explode. Marie-Therese Denfingier ably provides this calm in the storm's centre.

Leo-Paul Guenette fulfills his role as the son nicely. One is quite sure that his Pierre shall become the muddle-headed heir to his father, but shall lack his father's ability at bombast. Paulette Pariseau is equally convincing in her role of the wide-eyed innocent put-on Francoise.

Ron Aubin carries his role well, both as the present husband and as the actor portraying Napoleon. Manon Valee gives a good performance as the vain, hysterical and capricious leading lady. Her acting is improved from her earlier roles. She is learning how to manage theatrics without destroying the foolish dramatics of the characters she plays.

Simon Doucette is well able to handle her role of Nicole. She conveys the hopeless aspirations along with bitchy insistence which the role demands. Paul Denise turns in a fine performance as the weak but still effective stage manager.

The only flaw in Jean-Marc Caron's performance is his stilted actions. Too often he expresses Herve's anger and stubbornness through stiff arms and clenched hands. The character demands a greater range of expression.

One complaint which one may make about the actors in general is their portrayal of age. Caron is not convincing as a man with a twenty-year old son. Dentinger could also appear older, as could Valee. Perhaps because we recognize these actors personally from earlier roles we associate them all together in a certain generation.

A few words of commendation must go to the wardrobe designer, Micheline Duciaume. With all the roles the costumes are visible descriptions of the characters: Nicole's checkered pantsuit, Pierre's silly hat, Francoise's white golfs. The list could contain everyone else in the play. The costumes are so obviously the characters, yet there is no over-dramatization.

On the whole, the comedy is well-timed; the pace is always smooth and fast; the players were well-directed. Without a doubt *Interdit au Public* is one of the successes of this season's Theatre Francaise. It will be presented again this Friday, Saturday and Sunday at College St. Jean.

Maureen Forbes

Our Plinge
is mightier
Than
the sword.

Satya Das

A look at the Exorcist

There are times when a rather mediocre film manages to gather some sort of following and a semi favourable critique to ensure survival. When you take a mediocre film and do a publicity overkill, the box office booms, the critics bring out the long knives, and despite a constant stream of pans, the film manages to flourish. Such is the case with William Peter Blatty's film *The Exorcist*, currently playing at the Paramount.

Designed to shock is the kindest word for it, and even with this limited scope, the film has evident shortcomings. As most know by now, the plot concerns demonic possession of a young girl and an eventual exorcism. The book was supposed to have been very good, so naturally he was signed as the screenplay writer, and in this instance as the producer. An established director, William (The French Connection) Friedkin was brought in, the cast included screen stalwarts Max von Sydow and Lee J. Cobb, Ellen Burstyn, nominated for an Oscar in *The Last Picture Show* and playwright Jason Miller of *The Championship Season* fame.

There in a nutshell was the formula for a classic Hollywood success package, guaranteed to put Paramount Studios in the black for many months to come. It is indeed unfortunate that the combination while producing the desired crowds, achieved little in the way of artistic or cinematic merit.

I really did not feel the film deserved a critique, but here we go. The basic fault lies with the screenplay. It is very basic, and leaves character development totally up to the players. It carries no hints of subtle development, just introduces the actors and lets them take it from there. Obviously if a screenplay gives the characters little to say, they can't very well be expected to come up with worthy performances. In spite of this initial handicap, however, Jason Miller has managed to imbue a degree of adequacy into the role of Damon Karras, the initial exorcist. Ellen Burstyn is cast as an actress, mother of the possessed girl, and she has followed the shallow lead provided by Blatty's screenplay to the bitter end, never really making an effort to rise above it. Director Friedkin has not been very much help. He is so concerned with the special and technical effects and "scare value" of the film it appears he has spent no time with the players.

Max von Sydow earned his paycheck, but little else. Still, his professional abilities took over in an automatic sort of way and he came through with a semblance of credibility. Lee J. Cobb has been around for a long long time but sadly he has been

given a role that has no part in the film, that of a police inspector. Naturally, when the role does not belong in the film, Cobb's going-through-the-motions performance seems rather pathetic.

Von Sydow was cast as the priest who performed the final exorcism and tried with the willing aid of Miller to initiate an engrossing cinematic sequence, not quite succeeding.

As Regan, the girl possessed by the devil, Linda Blair at first glance appeared to have come up with quite a good performance, but introspection reveals that her role was not really too taxing, it called for her to lie bound on a bed while veteran actress Mercedes McCambridge voiced the mouthings of the devil. There is also substantial evidence to prove that one particular sequence of Regan mutilating herself with a crucifix was played by Eileen Leiber.

The technical effects were good, but lost all their impact in previous revelations by publicity that the "green slime" emanating from Regan's lips was pea soup, and various other giveaways such as a scene about a head turning about completely on a neck totally destroying whatever impact could have been made.

In summary, Blatty's screenplay was pathetically inept, Friedkin's direction lacked any artistic merit, and the players in an uninspired production turned out uninspired performances. Friedkin often skipped over connective sequences which would have aided in plot development to move from one scare package to another, giving little thought to continuity. He has used the stock shots seen so often throughout the years, he has not really used his imagination in showing the gradual spreading of Regan's affliction, being rather bored and blasé about it all.

It is totally ludicrous to imagine grown people fainting and vomiting in the aisles unless they have religious paranoia complexes, and it is totally unimaginable that people have had to be taken from the theatre in ambulances in the cases of several cities where the film played.

Perhaps the best way of summing up the film would be to quote a letter printed in *National Lampoon* allegedly from Father Phillip Berrigan..... which says "I used to think Mick Jagger was the devil, but now I know that Mercedes McCambridge is, and I'm scared shitless."

Let's hope that the next time Paramount tries to foist a mediocre film with an overkill of publicity they look back at the lack of talent displayed in *The Exorcist*.

theatre lives

That Championship Season by Oscar nominee Jason Miller. Next at the Citadel. Directed by Tibor Feheregyhazi and featuring Richard Kuss, Douglas Chamberlain, Michael Donaghue, Edward Rudney and Peter Rogan. Warning: In all fairness, the language used may be objectionable to some.

Interdit Au Public, a French comedy by Jean Marsan will be the next presentation of Le Theatre Francais d'Edmonton. The play will be directed by artistic director France Levasseur-Ouimet. Curtain times are 8:30 p.m. for March 22, 29, and 30; 7:45 on March 23; and 2:30 on March 24 and 31. Tickets may be purchased at the door or by phoning the box office at 467-3626. Prices are adults \$2.00 and students \$1.25. *en francais*

Walterdale Playhouse is currently running Warren Grave's fine play, *The Hand That Cradles the Rock*. Unfortunately we don't have a review because our reviewer got on the wrong bus and missed the show but accounts reaching this office indicate that the play is up to Walterdale's usually fine standards. Count yourself lucky if you managed to get a ticket early.

Gordon Peacock will be directing *Brecht on Brecht* in Studio Theatre's last production of the season. The play opens March 28. Students are permitted one free ticket if they can produce their I.D. card. Box Office is located in room 3-146 of the New Fine Arts Building. Office hours are 9 to noon and 1-4:30 in the afternoon. You'll have to be quick.

Please note the unusual location for this production. The play will be staged in Theatre 1, in the A/V Wing of the Humanities Centre. Use the second floor entrance.

the eyes have it

Latitude 53 has an interesting and unusual exhibit currently on display at their downtown gallery. They are currently showing Sylvain Voyers' art recycling depot. Gallery hours are: 12 p.m. - 5 p.m. Tuesday to Saturday and Thursday evening, 7-9 p.m. Location is at 10048 - 101 A Avenue.

The Edmonton Art Gallery in Winston Churchill Square is currently asking the question What is Impressionism? Currently on display are selections of French Impressionists paintings from the Scrymgeour, MacAulay and National Gallery collections. This exhibit attempts to clarify some of the similarities and differences between the originators of the Impressionist movement and their Canadian followers. The artists include Renoir, Guillaumin, Cordey and Vignon, all of whom exhibited in the original Impressionist shows between 1874 and 1886. Boudin, the teacher and printing companion of Monet, and Pierre Prins, a close friend and follower of Renoir.

film fare

Extra fine flic on at Student Cinema this weekend. Be sure to try and catch Troell's fine, fine *The Emigrants*. Touching and superb performances are given by both Max Von Sydow and Liv Ullman.

easy on the ears

Edmonton Folk Club presents Bill Russell, from Morin Heights, Quebec this Sunday night (March 31st) at Gameau Church Hall (84th ave, 112 street) at 8:00 p.m. Bill specializes in his own songs, plus a variety of traditional and nontraditional music (eg. national anthems on the guitar; Scott Joplin rags; french songs, etc.) He is an excellent guitarist, and puts on a complete show.

Backup act is Robin Cottle and Don McVeigh, who specialize in authentic old time folk music (with mandolin, banjo, fiddles, whistle, guitar, etc.) Admission is \$1.25; 75 cents for folk club members. (Cheap at twice the price.)

Bill Russel, a folksinger from Montreal, will be playing at the Hovel this Friday and Saturday evenings. Gay DeLorme will be playing some of his fine guitar music Sunday evening.

The Edmonton Chamber Music Society will be putting the finish to their season with a concert by Canada's Orford Quartet. They will play Mozart's *Quartet in D Minor, K 421*; *Lutowski's Quartet*; and *Brahm's Quartet in C Minor, Op. 51, No. 1*. The concert is scheduled for Wednesday, April 3 in Con Hall. Admission to the concert is by season membership. The Society will be selling tickets for the new season at the door.