

GAZETTE REVIEWS

Julius Caesar: great theatrical experience

If you didn't see this year's Dalhousie Drama Workshop presentation of JULIUS CAESAR hang your head in shame. Not that it was the greatest theatrical experience ever to hit Halifax, but it was good enough to make one forgive most of its faults.

Under John Ripley's competent but hardly brilliant direction the members of the Drama Workshop rebounded amazingly well from last year's dismal and often strangely humorous Romeo and Juliet. Evident throughout this year's production was the group's sincerity and desire to please. Their vitality reached out to the audience and captured its attention, and the experience was, we believe, pleasurable to both.

The talents of the cast varied. But with one exception all handled their chores well and with enjoyment.

There will be little argument that the best performance was given by Thomas Dunphy as Cassius. His Cassius was less the wily schemer and more the pas-

ionate head. This fitted in well with the youthful Rome the company gave us. The nobility of this Cassius came from his sincerity and drive rather than from his intellectual doubts, but perhaps this was unavoidable. But above all Mr. Dunphy's admirable stage presence shone through, and the intense flashing-eyed figure he gave us is not one to be forgotten quickly.

Les Gallagher's Brutus and Brian Crocker's Mark Antony also deserve mention. We could have wished for a nobler Brutus. Mr. Gallagher's Brutus at times seemed to be more confused by his situation than tortured by the terrifying conflicts in his loyalties and motivations. Nevertheless, considering Mr. Gallagher's age and experience, it was a good performance. Brian Crocker did a fine job in the role of Antony. He rose nobly to the acting opportunities in those moments after the assassination, and it is perhaps a quibble to say that the rest of his performance was not quite up to this level.

Two actors in lesser roles deserve special commendation. Susan Loring as Calpurnia and Dennis Rouvray as the conspirator Decius and the officer Titinius. They were close to perfect. Mark DeWolfe as that prig Octavius and Jane Purves as the neurotic Portia were good too, and Terry DeWolfe almost, but not quite, pulled off a tour de force as Casca.

The one near-disaster of the production was the casting of Oscar Hackett as Julius Caesar. This is by no means a demanding role but it needs to be at least competently done. Enough said.

Congratulations are in order to director Ripley and the members of the "crowd" for the presentation of Mark Antony's oration. This hair-raising spectacle was very good indeed; and it brought new life to Antony's over-familiar speech. But may we make one small caveat. The vigour of this scene tended to bring into focus the sluggishness and overall lack of movement in much of the rest of the play.

We need not mention the backstage and business activities of the production. Those involved did their job well and no doubt know it. Oh well, let's face it, the makeup tended to be a bit slapdash in many cases; and stabbing by blunt wooden daggers is a hell of a way to go.

To sum up: a pleasurable evening, a hint of good things coming, and a look at some promising acting talent.

Film Society

One of the major functions of a film society is to present to its patrons a varied selection of experimental films. On November 17 and 18 the Dalhousie Film Society featured 4 short films, 3 of which could legitimately come under this classification.

There is no doubt about THE GREAT TRAIN ROBBERY (1903) being an experimental film; and a very successful one at that. Those present were able to view a film which laid the groundwork for an overwhelming number of themes, plots, atmospheres, and clichés. Many of this film's scenes can be seen in various updating on any Saturday afternoon movie shown on T.V., but the chain (if that is the right word) of this classic still upholds its validity.

The most artistically complete offering of the night was a very brief film entitled HIGHWAY. What might have become a cliché-ridden mess of shots from speeding automobiles of underpasses, throughways, and overpasses instead was changed by beautiful editing, camerawork, light control and music into an evocation of beauty. Too often this theme has been used as a vehicle for criticizing our "modern way of life". It was pleasant to see the viewpoint of a filmmaker interested more in the artistic rather than the polemic possibilities of our urban situation. This film was "experimental" in the col-

loquial sense but certainly complete in itself.

The most interesting work shown was the Kenneth Anger film "Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome". Any attempt at an exposition of this truly disturbing film is doomed to failure. An analysis of themes and subjects would run into many pages, if indeed possible at all; and communicate little of its impact. Suffice to say that the title explained it all. Those who saw Jean Cocteau's BLOOD OF THE POST last year no doubt recognized the debts this film owed to even down to the lack of synchronization of background music and action.

The experimental tradition of surrealism (or rather Cocteauism for Cocteau never wished to have his film treated as surrealism) was shown to be valid yet in the fields where realistic commentary leaves off and poetry begins. Of course many who saw this film were probably no more than mildly amused or titillated but that's the way the world goes.

The feature film on the program was the Biston Keaton film COPS: the one where Keaton rides a wagon load of 6th rate junk into a parade of about 2 million fuzz. One of the longest if not the longest chase in film history ensues, but it's not really that funny. But perhaps the comedies of the Golden Age have just been oversold a bit.

From home to here

By DAVID ENGLISH

... I don't get on right at the beginning, of course; the train actually starts at Montreal. The "Beeg Ceety" we call it at Dal, but of course I can't say that in Quebec. . . . Anyway by the time it gets to Levis there are usually a few Dalhousie people on it and I can strike up a conversation; mine is no longer the only Dal jacket in sight. All the usual topics are worked over and I go to my berth. . . . it's a lower and I can raise the blind that the Porter has drawn and I watch the little towns whirl by in the gathering darkness as I move away from the sunset and toward the next dawn. I stay awake for a while longer and watch the headlights sweep along the Trans-Canada Highway as it parallels the tracks along the St. Laurent. . .

Then it's dawn and as I look out the bush and meadows of New Brunswick are covered with dew. There's a deer bounding away into the trees as we rattle by. I get up and the train stops on a siding miles from anywhere to let the westbound freight through. I stop on the platform between cars and look out. . . the sun is just coming up and one of the waiters jumps down to pick a few real flowers to supplement the plastic ones in the diner. I can hear the birds singing and I start to think it's a damn shame I can't get off here and walk into the Maritimes in my own time. Then the freight thunders past only inches away and as the train lurches into motion I make my way into the diner for breakfast.

All day the half-familiar scenery flashes past; the low lands of the Chignecto, then Amherst, then Truro, and the people getting on and off have a different look. . . They're not Quebecois. . . Past Shubenacadie and on through Hants County. . . lakes and ridges and roads and scattered houses and more lakes reflecting the trees; they're just starting to turn coloured. Then Bedford Basin and Halifax come into view. . . Registration tomorrow. . . here I am, University, love me or lump me. . .

At The Neptune

Oklahoma lacks charm, vitality

Back in the mid-forties Rodgers and Hammerstein's OKLAHOMA! electrified audiences and encouraged critics to herald the coming of a new age in the American musical stage. Little of this excitement was in evidence at the Neptune Theatre last week during Crier Publication's production of this classic.

True, the songs of Messrs. Rodgers and Hammerstein were there, but so was Mr. Hammerstein's plot. Last week's uninspired and at times slipshod presentation brought out all the banalities inherent in the story. It needed a lot of charm and vitality. Neither were present in any quantity.

The two leads performed well, at times very well, Sheila Bond as Laurey displayed a lovely singing voice, and Stephen Smith as Curly presented us with the only complete portrayal of the evening. Smith's singing of

"Poor Jud is Daid" was the worthy highlight of the show. Connie Munro as Ado Annie had her moments and Margaret Godfrey did very well indeed as Aunt Eller.

Director Jack Sheriff attacked the character of the heavy, Jud. The result was striking. His rendering of the song "Lonely Room" was a beautiful pastiche of the Brechtian style. Unfortunately his performance was quite out of key with the rest of the production, apart from his excellent silent assistance during the "Poor Jud" scene. The rest of the cast ranged from adequate to horrible.

Little attempt was made to take full use of the Neptune's stage, and the staging as a whole was bad. The chorus (who, it must be noted, sang well, at times) often appeared to be standing about the stage just wondering why the heck they were all there. So did this reviewer.

Understaffed symphony -

Halifax orchestra plays well

By PRENTISS GLAZIER
Gazette Staff

The concert of Wednesday, November 10, by the Halifax Symphony Orchestra under John Fenwick included six works: the Leonore Overture No. 3 by Beethoven, Adagio from Mahler's Fifth Symphony, three operatic arias, and after an intermission, the Symphony No. 4 in G Major by Dvorak. The Arias were "Vedro, mentiro sopro" from Mozart's Marriage of Figaro, "Di Provenza il mar" from Verdi's "La Traviata", and "O du mein holder abendstern" from Wagner's "Tannhauser" as performed by baritone soloist Phillip May of Dartmouth.

The baritone solos varied somewhat in quality. Mr. May began inauspiciously with Mozart's "Count's Aria," improved in the Verdi work, and finished strongly with the Wagner. Here the orchestra played well but Mr. May is not yet a baritone of first-rate quality, although he performed with precision and obviously did his best.

Beethoven's "Leonore Overture, always an excellent curtain raiser, was performed well but suffered from the outset from less than excellent acoustics and an orchestra that counts only forty-five musicians.

There was a slight tone-quality difficulty in the strings, but it was not very noticeable. It was more noticeable in Adagio for strings and harp from Mahler's Fifth Symphony, although Mahler seems to have actually intended that effect to a certain point. Nonetheless, in both these works, the lack of depth of the orchestra asserted itself and was especially keenly felt in the Fourth Symphony of Dvorak. Again, the performance was the exact opposite of sloppy: accurate and spirited. However, the twelve violinists were unable to hold up a part scored for about thirty. The work itself attributes its popularity to the wide range of curious instrumental effects which give it an overall pattern that is most pleasing. Hence it is extremely enjoyable although it is also poorly organized and as a whole seems disjointed. This of course is the company's doing.

The Halifax symphony orchestra is not blessed with the best of acoustics in the Saint Patrick's Auditorium, and worse yet, it is badly understaffed. The shortage is not so serious in the winds and percussion but this gives, in addition to other things, an unbalance with instrumental numbers out of proportion. Hence the strings were often not prominent enough. This had a considerable adverse effect upon the final outcome of the last work especially. Mr. Fenwick should be proud of this performance, as it was excellent apart from the above-cited defects. However, if the Halifax Symphony Orchestra is to become a genuinely first-rate orchestra, it will need a far better auditorium and will have to at least double its proportions, especially in the strings. If it cannot do this, it ought to become a chamber orchestra which will play works of chamber symphony proportions. In that capacity, it has already done creditably, and, under Mr. Fenwick's able direction, will certainly continue to do so.

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