

"Androcles" roaring success

by Stephen R. Mills
 Bernard Shaw left the Christian church at an early age but, in the truest sense of the word, was probably one of the most religious men who ever lived. His personal life (he was a non-smoker, non-drinker and vegetarian), his socialist views and most of his plays, point out his love for humanity as a group and as individuals. Shaw's chief aim in writing was to leave the world a little better, a little saner, than when he arrived. His works are generally devoted to smashing the falsehoods which surround every idea associated with man. Religion — the concept of God and Christ, conversion, redemption, faith, devotion — is the theme of his play "An-

drocles and the Lion" which was presented last week by the Dalhousie Theatre Department.

The controlled direction, sparse sets and lighting and careful acting showed that the company knew what they were doing. "Androcles and the Lion" is not one of Shaw's heaviest plays but its lightness does not equate with frivolity. The dialogue and characters, as in most Shaw pieces, are the distinguishing characteristics and this production wisely focused on them. The rather huge stage in the Sir James Dunn Theatre added to the production, supporting the illusion of a Roman forum, the scene of most of the action.

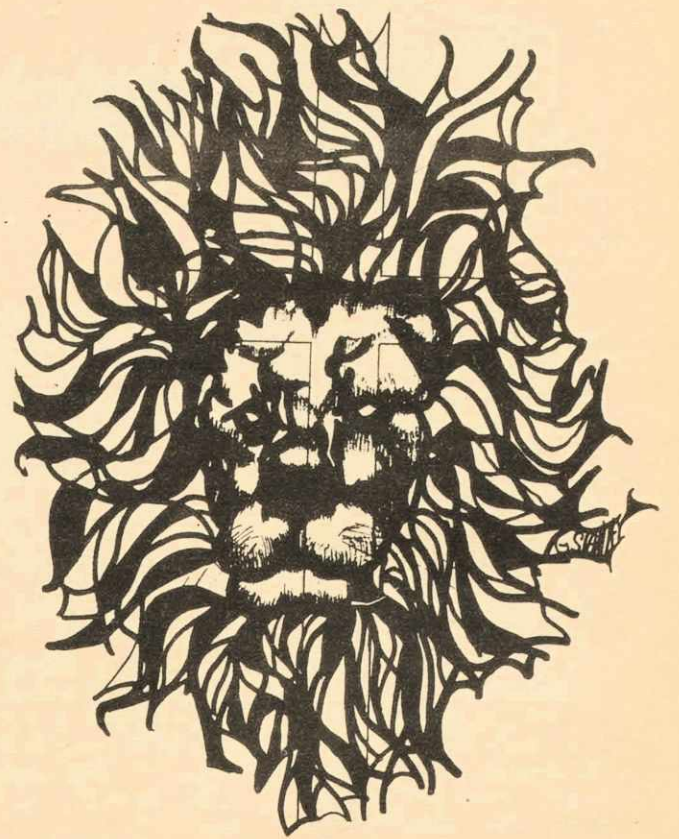
The play has a simple plot —

Androcles, a Christian, a lover of animals and a Greek tailor, removes a thorn from the paw of a lion. The scene switches to Rome where a group of captured Christians have been brought for the imperial circus. Their leader is a woman who, in conversation with a Roman captain here and throughout the rest of the play, presents the intellectual justification for her faith.

The actress in this part was good, bringing out in full force the pride and sincerity of her character. She was also able to convey the unnerving shallowness of the position, which is most important in the context of the play and Shaw's purpose. The audience can understand her position but her faith, even if it goes beyond the pretty fables of Christianity, does not offer much comfort to anyone but her.

The Roman Captain was well-played considering the fact that it is basically a nothing role. The Captain sounds exactly as one would expect an intelligent Roman talking with Christians to sound. The other Christians with this group are merely stage fillers and they can be complimented on attempting nothing more.

Androcles and two fellow Christians are brought in to join this first group. One of these is a nervous and wretched sinner, seeking martyrdom as his only chance to Heaven. The person in this part gave the best performance of the evening, with the possible exception of Androcles. He typifies the last chance Christian common to his era and every other since. Not surprisingly, Shaw has him denounce his faith and get killed while running to sacrifice to the



pagan gods.

Androcles' other companion, a warrior-of-sorts, represents another sort of Christian. He believes God should get rid of his fighting nature for him. When He doesn't — the warrior kills six Romans rather than be martyred — he abandons God and joins the Imperial ranks.

It seems that no one in the play but Androcles appreciates religion. His is the only faith that grows out of love — love of life and all things living, a desire to please, a gentle tolerance and compassion. Therefore Androcles, especially as played in this production, seems the only sincere Christian. Certainly the woman stays faithful with Androcles to the end but she projects no warmth, just smugness. Androcles' religion is as much a part of him as his mind. It is, perhaps like Shaw's, a central part of his being, a motivating force.

Of the other characters in the play (all were adequately done)

only two warrant discussion. One is a beggar who has no lines but simply reminds the characters (and the audience) that the issue in question — religion — relates to a real world where people are poor and people suffer.

The second character is a quiet little Christian who also remains faithful throughout. He reminds people that the bulk of genuine religious people are neither like the woman (cold and smug) or like Androcles (warm and vibrant) but combinations of the two — quiet, compassionate, sure of their position. Perhaps to say this is to read too much into the role but, in a play where nearly everyone talks, the silent characters may say the most.

The Theatre Department's company for this play are to be congratulated for fine use of their new facilities in producing "Androcles and the Lion", a small but important work by one of the great masters of the English stage.

Second Stage opens


by Alison Manzer

Neptune Theatre has opened its Second Stage with a production of David Freeman's "Creeps".

The play deals with the social problems faced by adults handicapped with cerebral palsy. The action and dialogue center around the washroom in a sheltered workshop where the major characters discuss issues of immediate concern, including male-female relationships and working conditions.

It is difficult to ascertain the exact message of the work but it seems to be saying that palsy victims are not deformed animals to be shut away and ignored but real people who need love, and understanding as does everyone else. The entire play deals with the individual problems faced by the main characters so that their humanness — their similarity to the audience is brought home.

The acting is superb throughout. The Second Stage actors were able to take on the characteristics of handicapped people without becoming objects for artificial sympathy. Situations were believable because the actors portrayed credibly the affects of social isolation. The theatre itself, located in an old house on Barrington Street, was much different than Neptune's main stage. The smallness and bareness of this new setting served to emphasize the disturbing and thought-provoking nature of this first production.



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