

Drama criticism:

ROMANOFF AND JULIET

LEON MAJOR APPEALS TO LOW AUDIENCE LEVEL

Danton once remarked of Saint-Just, that what he wanted in France was a Republic of Sparta, while there should be a Republic of Cockaigne. Peter Ustinov, in his satirical farce, "Romanoff and Juliet," successfully defends all such "Cockaignes," "where buttered larks fall from the skies and obese roast fowl invite the reader to a feast" against the devouring claims of our two modern Spartas, — the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. The author pleads a right to eat, drink, and make love, thus opposing absurd demands of the state, on the lives of the individual.

With a customary verbal dexterity, he sets a stage of the smallest European principality, adds an ideological conflict, a beautiful girl and a handsome young man—(respectively the son and daughter of Soviet and American ambassadors) then molds all into one. The reaction of their parents is, on the one hand "deviationist" and on the other "why didn't we take her to a psychiatrist. The conflict continues, through a series of wit-sprinkled skits in which the two opposing world powers are juxtaposed, with a self-appointed mock general acting as intermediary, intent on accomplishing world peace in miniature.

In the actual script, love as usual, laughs, but neither sentimentally nor hoarsely — before peace is attained the night spirals into fantastic comedy — but behind it all is the soundest wisdom — and here Ustinov does not press his point; he leaves it to our own perception.

Leon Major, however, in an unfortunate and, I hope, misguided, appeal to a low audience level, pressed an already subtle lesson into obscurity. Poor pacing and studied theatrics buried much of Ustinov's brilliant dialogue. Lines were thrust to the audience in a rush for the next laugh. The director has failed

here, in his reputed attempt to raise Halifax standards of theatrical appreciation; for rather than bring the people to Ustinov, he has adapted the play to the people — and thus, in an attempt at clashing realism with fantasy he has lost the effect of both.

THE AMERICANS

The set designs, of simplified realism, are both ingenious and effective — both sets and costumes effectively mold into the performance. Minor inconsistencies, as Evdokia Romanoff dressed in a frilled half-bustle, offering her soul for a lace hat provide surprise; equally inconsistent and equally surprising however, is the quality of the performers — as a group they lacked both weight and co-ordination. Both Romanoff and Juliet either showed naivete to the point of stiffness or, in trying to achieve tragic proportions, showed themselves melodramatic and ineffective. The American ambassador, a crew-cut, pompous, inane diplomat was very well played by Bernard Behrens. (A fault may be that this acting accentuated the self-conscious theatrics of his fellow performers). His flattering and silly wife (Mary Murray) lost valuable dialogue by the continual mimicry of a Southern

drawl, for which she lacked that essential Southern warmth, so often giving valuable character to Southern stupidity.

THE RUSSIANS

Their opponents, (the Russian household,) seemingly had a more relaxed and effective co-ordination. Deborah Cass, playing Evdokia Romanoff, mother to "the wayward lover" showed some degree of solidarity and even humanity. Vadim, her husband (George Sperkdakos) struck a significant and tragic note in his understanding of the Russian's self-dramatisation. His performance became less than excellent however, through an accelerated pacing, for thus part of Ustinov's most valuable satire was left behind. It was this Soviet official that had been permitted a speech of genuine emotional depth and power (no such profession of human dignity was allowed the American), and it was again a tendency to superficiality and melodrama that prevented an effective completion of this part.

The general, Norman Walsh, had the important tasks, first of bringing together two opposing factions and, secondly, of bringing the audience into sympathy and identify with the production; that he tried was obvious, and perhaps for this reason he failed. His position was later taken over by Ted Fellows, as Archbishop of the Unorthodox Church. The costume, make-up, and dialogue of this venerable dignitary combined for his effective presentation — and one felt on his leaving the stage that he would crumble peaceably into a pile of venerable dust in the wings.

COMMENTARY:

"Are you immoral too?"

By Ian Chambers

Should we not be offended that someone or ones in the province think that we are of so low an intellectual level that we read some books, acknowledged masterpieces, merely for the so-called "pornographic-content?" Catullus is edited and revised, or large parts omitted, because otherwise Latin students might be corrupted. Voltaire is hacked to death — most of James Joyce banned. Does the province think that so much of its citizenry have such a turn of mind that they have no better appreciation for literature than to search for lewd content?

JAMES JOYCE

I suggest that the officials listen more closely to the type of language used by too many Nova Scotian men, and women, or have a look at the magazine stands now and then. There is very little Catullus or Joyce can do to corrupt us after that.

In any case no matter what kind of literature comes into the province, who has the right to take it upon themselves to judge whether it is "fit" or not? As long as I have lived in this province I have not met or seen anyone of such divine moral standards or such complete omnipotent wisdom, or that is so much better than the rest of his compatriots that he can claim to be qualified.

YOUTH AND SEX

The excuse usually used, is that government does not want to corrupt the "youth" of the province. If parents cannot bring up their children beyond the point where

FAILURES

The script of "Romanoff and Juliet" provides a good light comedy with serious, and not too facile undertones. Leon Major has not, however, successfully brought the Halifax audience to Ustinov, and thus the Halifax theatre, for all its publicized brilliance, generally lacks a sense of coming to grips with any of the stronger emotional aspects of conflict and drama. The characters lack depth and weight; they entertain the audience, but only momentarily. Even this ephemeral moment however, is better than no theatre at all. The only way to improve the calibre of these performances is to improve the calibre of audience participation, and for this reason the play is very much worth seeing. M. G.

they seek such perverted thrills, the province can do nothing about it and meanwhile any good book that has one off-colour metaphor can be barred. If the province is so worried about the morals of its young people, why does it not give them some sort of sex education in the schools, or if it leaves this, as it should, to the parents, can it not trust them also to give their children enough common sense, sense of decency and maturity that they can be "trusted"?

This is only another reflection of the Victorian attitude that if you don't talk about wrong it will disappear. Such vital social issues as prostitution or homosexuality are hushed up. How can anything be solved, how can society move forward, if such things cannot even be discussed? We are not little children of a maternal provincial or federal government that wants to keep us innocent; every citizen has a right to his own moral standards, and he should not be forced into a communal conscience. But every citizen also has the right to read whatever he wants to read, and no government can stop that right.

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