

the ARTS

Bass quintet concert Friday

Friday, February 15 the Gallery of the Rutherford Library will be enlivened with a brass quintet concert at 11:00 a.m.

The quintet consists of Ed Pedersen on trumpet, Wendy Grasdahl on trumpet, Larry Reese on horn, Chris Taylor on trombone and Henry Vant Erve on tuba.

Works selected for presentation include an anonymous sonata from *Die Bankelsangerlieder* and four madrigals by Carlo Gesualdo. Concert music for brass

quintet will feature John Adson's *Ayre* and Claude Gervaise's *Pavane and Galliard*.

J.S. Bach will be represented by *Contrapunctus IX* from *The Art of the Fugue*.

The program will be completed with Arthur Frackenpohl's 1966 *Brass Quintet*. This should certainly liven up the sombre atmosphere of Rutherford and the acoustics of the building should prove quite edifying. It sounds like a pleasant way to pick up the morning.

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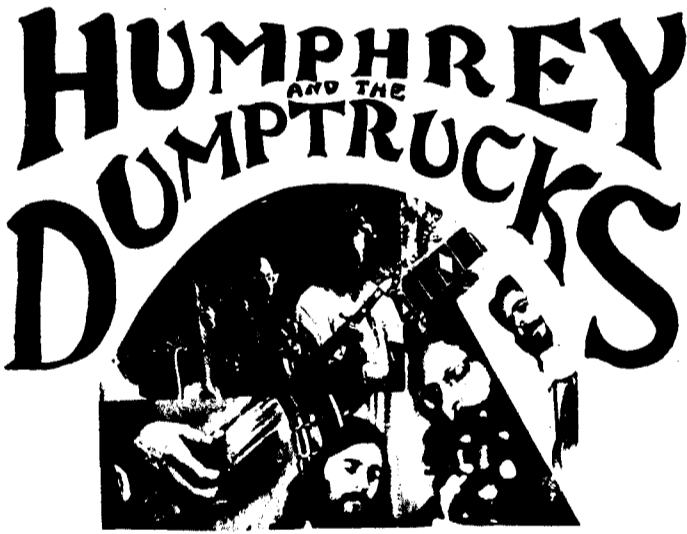
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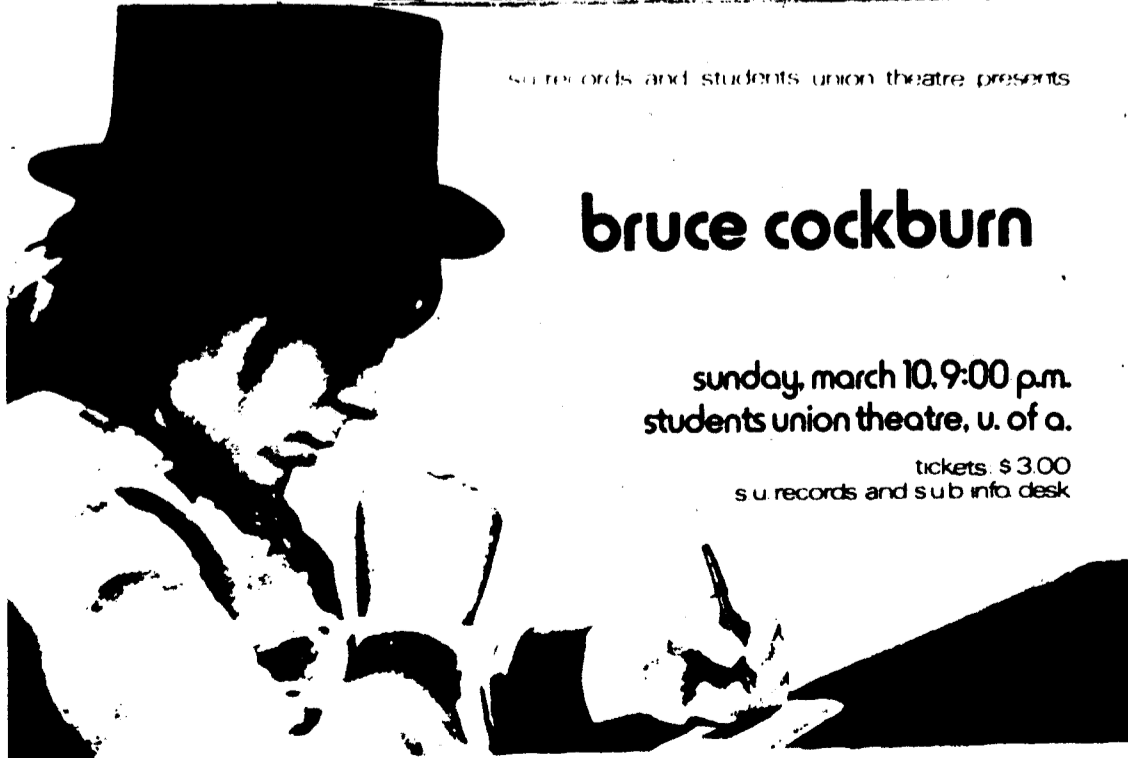


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The slightly Fantasticks

Saturday night's opening of *The Fantasticks* was something of a disappointment. Not that it was unpleasant it is just that I have come to expect work of exceptional caliber from Walterdale's amateur company.

It is almost axiomatic amongst amateur company that sooner or later they must attempt a musical. Musicals are fun to do and they are almost inevitably well attended. Still, it is difficult to make an artistic success of a musical. They almost always call for large casts and high expenses which means they are usually major undertakings with many a pit-fall in them. The disease is seldom fatal but the project usually manages to hit its share of sour notes along the way.

The Fantasticks comes as close as any musical to being the solution to everything from small budgets and few musicians. It is the most skeletal of plays and requires next to nothing for staging. The cast is small and the plot is simple.

Two fathers conspire to build a wall between their property so as it will separate their son and daughter. The theory behind this is that separating them is the quickest way to make them fall in love. Since the fathers are anxious to marry of their son and daughter to each other they arrange for a rape scene to be played. In the scenario the

son, Matt triumphs over the bandit Gallo and appears as a hero in Luisa's eyes. When the glow of romance fades and Matt realizes that Luisa is after all, only the girl next door, fate has to intervene and show them the wickedness and the misery of the world before they realize how well off they are.

The script by Tom Jones and music by Harvey L. Schmidt thrives in a stripped down theatrical context reminiscent of a paper bag theatre. In such a setting few props are required since a cardboard disc serves equally well as sun and moon, separating the day and the night and the seasons of love. A mute character plays the wall and the seasons and the weather. The play is subtitled a parable about love. In keeping with the spirit of a parable the mystery of love and life is revealed with Zen-like austerity. This concept which once seemed so daring now seems a trifle old-fashioned and unimaginative. The sentimentality of the material has turned coy but still manages to retain its original charm.

Peter Feldman's direction was slightly clumsy. The movement and the pacing of the play were never comfortable except where they had been choreographed. There were lots of annoying loose ends like garbled duets and some sour notes. A few days

more rehearsal time probably would have solved most of these details. A little more inventiveness would have pinned down a bit more graphically the sentiment of the play.

Michael Bell and Carol Steinbring as the young lovers, Matt and Luisa were somewhat lost in their roles. They never quite managed to work together as a team, even before the romance had faded. They both have distinctly different styles. Michael Bell was effective with his Robert Redford casual good looks but he tried to trade on this more than the traffic would bear. In the prose passages he was wooden and in the songs he had a far too frenetic gesticulating delivery that smacked of an Elmer Gantry hard-sell. Miss Steinbring had an even more difficult time getting it all together. She tripped up in a number of her songs. This seemed to discourage her from the beginning. Perhaps if she had worked with the others more she would have been more confident in her singing.

Vic Bristow was well cast as the father of Matt, Hucklebee. He has an easy manner with an audience which stood him in good stead and put a light touch in the proceedings. Neil Miller as Bellomy had the voice if not the years to succeed as Luisa's loving but dim father.

Clifford McDonald came up with the evening's show stopper as the dissipated thespian Henry. He quite stole the show with his devastating delivery that gave even the most innocent of lines an absurd touch. Doug Cavers got his share of the laughs as well as Mortimer, Henry's partner and confidant. A truly splendid collection of rogues.

Orest Semchuk played the Mute with what could only be described as aplomb. It was a pity that more use wasn't made of him by the director. The character of the mute can do so many things to put excitement into this show that it is sheer negligence to ignore the possibilities here.

None of the songs in the show had the power and poignancy that they had when they were original. Time has robbed them of much of their magic and this makes it very difficult for the singer to infuse them with meaning. They were sung with feeling if a little carelessly. Some passages got badly garbled and there were enough sour notes to make even me cringe. Still, *Try to Remember* was nicely handled by Joe Vassos as Gallo. He also managed to make the rape song shine with some of its original sparkle.

Mr. Vassos was very much the backbone of this production. It was his strength that infused this play with its sense of confidence. He has an easy manner and a fair voice which both provided the production with some of its finer moments.

The Fantasticks has a lot going for it. The enthusiasm of the Walterdale company and the timelessness of the story falls short only because of a lack of brilliant inspiration. It has merits enough to outweigh this in the comic masterpiece of Clifford McDonald which certainly is inspired. I certainly wouldn't recommend that anyone stay away. Just remember that it's an amateur musical. Usually that smarts like hell if you're an amateur company that is as proud of its professional dedication as Walterdale is but I mention it just to keep things in perspective. The production isn't perfect but it is worthwhile.



DATE Thursday, February 21

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