

THEATRE

Finian's Rainbow best Jubilaires thing in years

Each year the Jubilaires' feature musical seems to be characterized by one brilliant and by one less than adequate performance. This year has been no exception; *Finian's Rainbow*, which appeared at the Auditorium last weekend, was made thoroughly enjoyable by the performance of Susan Brinsmead, and was threatened by the poor showing of Chuck Newell.

The show was very good, certainly the best of recent years. Its chief merit was consistency—a consistency of humor that kept the smile on one's face throughout the evening. There were no serious moments of dragging, no interludes of boredom. Scene flowed smoothly to scene, and there was a happy absence of long and dull soliloquies.

Wes Stefan as Finian McLonergan turned in an excellent performance, capturing all the buoyance of the Irish temperament. But Mr. Stefan is by now a veteran of the stage, and his performance here needs no further comment. Susan Brinsmead, however, is a newer face, and her performance as the pert Sharon McLonergan is worthy of note. Miss Brinsmead played the part flawlessly, and carried every scene in which she appeared; when she stopped to sing such delicate tunes as "How Are Things in Glocca Morra" she was enchanting.

Had all of the acting and singing been of the quality put forth by Stefan and Miss Brinsmead, the show would have been nothing short of tremendous. But alas, it was not to be so: Chuck Newell strode on the stage, mumbled his lines inaudibly, and sang with a total lack of enthusiasm.

Newell was simply not convincing as a merchant sailor come back to the hills of Missitucky:

he was clothed in a button-down shirt, cowboy boots, and a collegiate haircut, and assumed mannerisms totally alien to the character of Woody Mahoney. Much of this was perhaps due to poor direction; at times, when Mr. Newell appeared to remember that he was on stage before two thousand people, his performance approached the merely mediocre.

Speaking of poor direction, a few words about the general presentation of the play might be in order. This year the Jubilaires made up for poor vocalization by using a loudspeaker system. This at least made the dialogue more audible than in previous years, but too often I got the impression that the actors were speaking or singing to the



—Derek Nash photo

SUSAN BRINSMEAD

microphones (several of them spaced along the front of the stage) rather than to the audience. It was equally disturbing when someone crossed the stage, speaking as he went, his voice rising and following as he passed in and out of range of the mikes.

Electronic amplification is doubtless better than inaudibility, but is a poor substitute for proper projection. This has been a constant flaw in the Jubilaires productions, where so many of the lead singers have been incapable of projecting their voices throughout the theatre. The microphones caused some of the male voices to come out sounding like old, scratchy 78 r.p.m. records; and even with the aid of loudspeakers, there were complaints in the balconies that the voices could not be heard.

However, I don't want to do too much nit-picking. The production was, as I have said, thoroughly enjoyable, and at all times the players conveyed a feeling of happy enthusiasm to the audience. The dance routines of Jeremy Leslie-Spinks and Patricia Wilson were astonishing, and the choreography in general was of its usual high calibre. Don Sorochan as the leprechaun Og was competent and very amusing, despite a tendency to whine out his lines. Brian Chiles as Buss Collins, Senator's lackey, failed to make the role as strong as it might have been, but his part in the hilarious scene at the Senator's mansion redeemed him.

(I might explain incidentally the presence of a mysterious personage on stage who had me confused until I enquired about her later. She was wearing a blazer and carrying a clip-board, somewhat like a strayed script girl. It seems that she was supposed to be a social worker among the sharecroppers. I wish this had been either explained or omitted.)

I might conclude with the usual vain plea to the Jubilaires to consider more carefully their choice of plays in future. An ambitious attempt such as *Finian's Rainbow*, or any Broadway play requiring more than two or three really good actors and singers, is bound to have serious flaws. There is simply not enough talent among university students—at least available talent—to adequately fill all the roles in a large-scale production.

—Terry Donnelly

Citadel comedy yields to Guild's history pageant

The productions of *The Owl and the Pussycat* and *The Hollow Crown*, by the Citadel and the Friendship Guild at the Centennial Library Theatre respectively, form an interesting contrast between professional and amateur theatre.

The Owl and the Pussycat, produced by Edmonton's only "resident professional theatre" is an example of "professional" comedy in the worst sense of the word.

Briefly, it is the story of an academic bachelor writer and a sometime prostitute. The girl turns up in his apartment after he has caused her to be evicted from her own. They fall in love, and try desperately to adapt themselves to the other's way of life.

The failure of this play is due essentially to a lack of direction. The play is a weak one to begin with, and it has been attacked too violently. Virtually every line is delivered with an equal amount of unnecessary bombast.

There is no comedy here. Comedy does not mean lack of subtlety. Overstated comedy can be as disastrous as overstated tragedy.

Whatever social relevance the play might have had, and there is some, underneath it all, it all has been stripped away. What remains is a frame for bad comedy. Unfortunately even some of this is lost. The more subtle lines are destroyed through lack of timing.

Jack Heller's performance as F. Sherman is only mediocre. Marlene Warfield's rendition of Doris W. is not that good.

The sets and costumes, happily, were of their usual high quality. It must be admitted there are good connotations to the word 'professional'.

I suspect that this play was chosen and produced for the benefits of a "good solid box office". It has very little dramatic merit. Even more distressing than the failure of the play itself is the fact that this reasoning will probably be justified by a large popular acclaim.

This play, as I said, contrasts sharply with *The Hollow Crown*. *The Hollow Crown* has been produced by the Friendship Guild, a non-professional group.

It is a reading of poems, letters, documents, etc. by and about the kings and queens of England. This dramatic pageant is mixed with music on the same theme.

This is a less pretentious and more successful production than that of the Citadel. It has the effect of a quiet evening in someone's drawing room. This effect is increased by the intimate quality of the Centennial Library Theatre.

These performers make no bones about being amateur. If anything, they are too self-conscious of the fact. This is a good example of community theatre, and proof that community theatre does not have to be bad.

There are flaws, though. The most glaring one is Jean MacIntyre's reading of Jane Austen's "Partial, Prejudiced, and Ignorant" history. The dry humour of Jane Austen at the age of fifteen is completely eclipsed by Mrs. MacIntyre's characterization of a simply scatterbrained old dowager.

However, it must be admitted that this is not a production of universal appeal. It is interesting, but not exceptionally exciting. Those who do go to see this should make sure they have a solid grounding in English history first.

One of the fortunate by-products of seeing *The Hollow Crown* is the chance to see the art displayed in the theatre lobby. It is one of the best displays I have seen this year.

It is even more intriguing because it is the work of children from Edmonton schools. Children is a misnomer, for I found at least one work by a person aged twenty.

These works show a great deal of imagination. They give ingenious variations of just about every 'style' or 'school' ever devised. For people with little or no training, they betray a surprising control.

Anyone who is at all interested in art must try to see this display. It is quite separate from the theatre, and may be visited any time the library is open.

—Bill Pasnak