

# Theatre Shirley Neuman looks at this week's Olivier play and at a forthcoming Studio Theatre presentation



PALMISTRY OR PASSION?

—Theo Bruseker photo

... rehearsing at Studio Theatre

## A Month in the Country

Free tickets for *A Month in the Country* are available to all university students beginning next Wednesday. You may obtain a ticket by presenting your I.D. card at the Department of Drama Office (second floor, Corbett Hall) between the hours of 9:00 A.M. and 4:30 P.M. Monday through Friday. Tickets for this performance can be obtained between Wednesday, October 18 and Friday, October 27.

Ivan Turgenev's play is about the repressed desires of two aristocratic Russian women: Natalia and her young ward, Vera. Natalia indulges in the pursuits typical of the high-born lady spending a month in her country home: she makes lace, reads desultorily, colours her conversation with French phrases, bemoans the dullness of her husband and amuses herself with the philosophic repartee of an admirer, Rakitin, with whom she has carried on a playful, but fruitless, flirtation for several years. But in spite of all these pastimes and the patient understanding of Rakitin, Natalia is fretful; she finds life constricting.

Beliaev, her son's new tutor, becomes a catalyst. He is the object of Vera's first love and his naturalness and healthiness make Natalia long for a freedom she has never known. The realization that her marriage and her long and unconsummated affair with Rakitin were but a slight approximation of the love she now feels for the young Beliaev, coupled with her incapacity for rebellion, leaves her defenceless, all her pettiness and malice exposed.

The Studio Theatre production, opening October 24, will be directed by Professor

Frank Bueckert and designed by Professor Gwen Keatley. Natalia will be played by Lee Royce, Vera by Nancy Beatty, Beliaev by Meldrum Tuck, and Rakitin by Alex Diakun. These four actors, as well as those filling minor roles, are students in the Department of Drama.

Miss Beatty terms the play "an emotional monopoly game." The amusements, the flirtations, the entire social etiquette by which the characters live—all these have elaborate, ritualistic and often funny rules. Only when confrontation with genuine and uncontrolled emotion betrays the maze of repressed drives and interacting motives dominating each character are we allowed to see beyond their social codes.

In many ways, *A Month in the Country* is like a contemporary motion picture script or a psychological novel. Instead of attempting to play towards some overt theme or moral, Professor Bueckert is directing the drama as a series of exquisitely pointed vignettes, each of which reveals progressively more of its personages. The actors' problem is one of creating impressions and moods which come and go as quickly as the summer storm which symbolizes them.

This evanescence is reiterated in the set, which strives for continuous exterior effects of sunlight through clouds or leaves. Mrs. Royce has pointed out that throughout the play the sensuous awareness of all the characters, and particularly of Natalia, grows with their realization of emotional potential. This will be restated with lavish period costumes, designed for tactile as well as visual appeal.

The changeful nature both of the action and of the set keeps the play a comedy. The tragedy seems a tragedy of air, too ludicrous, too passing, to remain a tragedy; it fills the expansive Russian atmosphere of the drama with delicacy and lightness.

## Love for Love

It is probably true that the name of Sir Laurence Olivier drew the crowds to this week's presentation of *Love for Love*. But critic Shirley Neuman saw more in the production than its star, and has high words of praise for other aspects of the play.

Special thanks are due to Shirley for working overtime in getting this review to the presses in time for this week's *Casserole*—this involved the unenviable task of writing the review the night of the play and subsequently attempting to break into the Students' Union Building in the wee hours.

Royalty needs no introduction. In the theatre, as elsewhere, it commands, and so commanding wraps even the humblest in its presence. *Royalty* came to Edmonton Monday night in the company of the National Theatre of Great Britain's production of William Congreve's *Love for Love*, a tale of covetousness and romance.

For three never-to-be-forgotten hours a capacity audience knew the special state of grace that only theatre in its finest moments can bestow.

### 'King reigns but does not govern'

Great actors can often be distinguished by their ability to give a fine performance without eclipsing others. "The king reigns but does not govern." So Laurence Olivier and the other great actors never allowed their characters to assume a larger portion of our attention than their part in the drama merited.

*Love for Love*, unlike most productions, did not feature only one or two outstanding performers; it was a completely integrated production in which all the cast acted brilliantly and none obtruded themselves.

Perhaps the puns, visual as well as verbal, afforded the greatest delight. Every nuance of speech and gesture was a deliberate implication of some jest underlying seemingly commonplace words and actions. It is here that the National Theatre Company's professionalism made itself most keenly felt. Costumes, sets, movements: all were utilized to pun and to ridicule.

### A polished, professional production

Thus Mrs. Foresight and Mrs. Frail set their headdresses wagging so that we almost expect to hear them cluck as they scheme their way to a husband for Mrs. Frail; Miss Prue clumps onstage in unabashed contradiction of her name; Mr. Foresight's telescope swings around to discover his daughter "undone"; the ladies move towards one another in what must be described as a personified simper when they find they have both sacrificed their virtue (or whatever remained of it) in the same ill-reputed rooms.

The production abounds in totally free, totally graceful gesture and delivery of dialogue. Yet it retains an impression of economy, for every word and gesture is concisely directed, nothing is unpointed.

Not a little of the evening's magic was provided by Lila de Nobili's exquisitely designed sets. Against their richness, the play assumed at moments the quality of a Vermeer painting.

After the praise is lavished, the adjectives spent, there is left still a world of impressions. Majesty touches the very core of one's being, infuses it with values too fragile for expression. We know through feelings as well as through words. Great theatre is an affair of the heart as well of the mind.