

Fassbinder, Mishima plays:

Good to the last drop

Elliott Lefko

Feminism in the theatre has never been treated so bizarrely as in the current double bill at Theatre Autumn Leaf of Rainer Werner Fassbinder's *Bremen Coffee* and Yukio Mishima's *Sotoba Komachi*.

Directed by York Graduate professor Dean Gilmour, *Bremen Coffee* dramatizes the true story of a small-town housewife in Germany who murders her friends, husbands, and relatives by poisoning their coffee. Although no explicitly stated, her motive for mischief lies in her itching to escape the bonds of domesticity.

Rather than playing it for tears though, Fassbinder uses his play as an indictment and satire of the German businessman, the conniving priest, the moronic soldier, and the gossipy villagers. Instead of pitying the people as they drop one by one, the audience actually cheers.

Fassbinder's movies, such as *Lili Marleen* and *The Marriage of Maria Braun* have become popular for their biting portrayals of the Germany of yesterday; its strengths and flaws. With plays such as *Bremen Coffee* reaching North American playhouses, audiences fascinated with Fassbinder's films can now share in a greater understanding of

the writer's illuminating glimpse into the personalities behind his country's history.

The second half of the bill showcases a rare performance of ancient Japanese noh theatre. Noh uses four or five actors, lasts only one hour, and employs the musical accompaniment of flute, drums, and, in director Thom Sokolski's version of *Sotoba Komachi*, whirlybirds and beer bottles.

Komachi was re-worked in 1953 by Yukio Mishima, a Japanese writer who died a few years ago by committing harikari (disembowelling oneself) while filming himself.

The play unfolds in a dream-like manner as a poet comes across an old woman sitting on a park bench amidst all the Sunday afternoon lovers. The poet falls under a spell and together they re-enact an affair that the old woman had 80 years ago.

Sokolski uses large masks, puppets, and elaborate backdrops to add a further dimension to what is a very oral drama. The play takes the form of a structured dance with the player's movements punctuated by the one actor who is coordinating the sounds.

The seven actors employed in both productions, led by Donna Bothen as the old woman in *Komachi*, and an



"Hark! What are those glorious, mellifluous sounds flowing from your knee? Could it be...Frankie and the boys?"

enthusiastic actor named Mark Christman, who was in both plays, are all quite believable.

The theatre showed a good-hearted sense of the absurd, even aside from their choice of plays, by serving coffee immediately after the performance of *Bremen Coffee*.

Theatre Autumn Leaf is located at 666 King St.W.(at Bathurst), and the twin-bill runs until September 27, Tuesday-Saturday, with a Sunday matinee. There-an added performance Friday at midnight.

Next week: Jean Genet's *Say Hello to Harvey*.

Germans hot ticket at AGYU

Marilyn Hare

The 1800's were fertile years for the arts in Germany, an epoch in German history remarkable for its developments in music, opera, poetry, theatre, and philosophy. In the visual arts, it was an era that took in such movements as Symbolist Realism, Impressionism, Romanticism, and The Nazarenes. Recent months have seen exhibitions of German art from this period at New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art and at the Art Gallery of Ontario. As a modest supplement to these major shows, the Art Gallery of York University (AGYU) will be showing "Nineteenth Century German Drawings and Prints" until October 16.

The combination of visual arts with music, dance, and drama forms a common bond in German art. The works in the AGYU exhibit have been selected by curator Michael Greenwood from three other collections in the area to reflect this bond. Greenwood has beautifully captured the essence of German Romanticism and the unity of the arts — the current exhibit provides an enticing taste of this multi-sensual experience. The exhibit is open from 10am to 4:30pm, Monday to Friday, and since it's free, it shouldn't be missed.

Following the German show, the gallery will host a display of photography by Brian Condon on the theme of Niagara Falls (with the emphasis on the tourists). Condon uses a process called Duotone, which uses a fine screen to combine two prints into one, creating a realistic appearance and depth not ordinarily obtainable in photographs. Condon's suite of 35 images will be the AGYU's last exhibit of the season before it closes for renovations until next fall.

The gallery is located at N145 Ross, so take a cake walk, doc.

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