

Catherine the Great is a cold Polish nympho

by David Schatzky

"She's a nymphomaniac . . . from Poland," said the misinformed lady who sat beside me. She was talking about Catherine the Great, the German born Empress of Russia, played by French born Jeanne Moreau in the English movie GREAT CATHERINE. The Polish joke is that Zero Mostel and George Bernard Shaw wrote it.

I've seen Jeanne Moreau twice, but only in English films. Maybe she loses something in the translation, but she's so memorable, I can't even remember what the last film I saw her in was . . . or if she was in it! She performs ably enough but lacks the charm that even French girls from Trois Rivieres have. Is the word "sang-froid"? Somehow a coldblooded nympho seems a contradiction in terms.

Well, even cooler than her is Peter O'Toole. He plays his usual stylish blue-eyed icicle, but this time it fits. He is well cast as the foil to the mad Russian Patiomin, Catherine's confidante, a degenerate noble. That part is camped and hammed by the Olivier of Burlesque: Zero Mostel. If you thought he overdid it in The Producers, you should see him now.

If you can go along with his excesses, however, you'll find much to enjoy in his portrayal, which is as deep as it is broad.

Akim Tamiroff is up to his usual unshaved and unshavian tricks as the Winter Palace's general factotum; and Jack Hawkins is admirably correct as the long suffering British Ambassador to Moscow.

The plot, based very loosely on history ("any similarity to real events is a miracle", say the producers, revolved around a bit of political intrigue at the time of the American Revolution, when Russian intelligence was expanding, but Russian society was enjoying a decline and fall equal only to Rome's.

Catherine falls in love with an English envoy (Peter O'Toole) but he wants no part of her . . . especially her toe, which has a tendency to tickle his ribs. He is, as he explains, "a trifle ticklesome", and, moreover, is engaged to be married, and to the British Consul's daughter yet! Catherine is determined, however, to make the most of him. After all, she complains, she is the only one in Russia who gets no fun at all out of her being Empress.

The highlights of this slickly directed film come in what might be called "production numbers". There's

a magnificent ballroom scene with some witty dancing, and some lusty Cossack antics worthy of the Red Army Chorus, and a riotous orgy which would leave Fellini breastless.

Another winning scene is between O'Toole and Moreau fighting out a scale model version of the Battle of Bunker Hill. All kinds of assinine things go on during this sequence, as when O'Toole warns: "I'm going to fire on your left flank," . . . and does.

Great Catherine, then, is very funny and a lot of the praise for this is due to Shaw's satire aimed at the battle of the sexes, and British and Russian national characteristics.

If you can survive the first 15 minutes of this show, you'll find the rest grows on you, charmingly and chucklingly. Look out, though, for the witless travelogues that are on the same bill at the Hollywood. If seems that travelogue writers think up the most cliché ridden scripts possible, purposely to annoy an audience trying to enjoy the great scenery. Also screened is the promotional material, boosting Chitty Chitty Bang Bang, which is admirably produced to leave the impression that the last thing you should do is see it.

by Frank Liebeck

John Herbert, the internationally acclaimed Toronto playwright, whose Fortune And Men's Eyes is now playing on

of the break-up. Secondly, if indeed they had been together for such a long time, their previous arguments were probably just as bad as this one, so why split up now? It wasn't as if both were hurt be-

London. This was the version where the prisoners walked naked onto the stage after taking a shower. The papers forgot the fact that the play had been playing to good houses in another theatre for two months in the same city before this abortion opened. "Everybody is trying to get on the Hair bandwagon." What Mr. Herbert is after is the stripping of a man's soul, not his body. He disagreed with this production.

The second one-acter is Gin Rummy, by Steve Bordeniuk, about two lesbians and their straight room mate. The third girl is from a farm in Quebec, and is waiting for

the toughest theatre town around. The audience comes in with an "amuse me if you can" attitude. "What do they expect for two bucks? A fuckin' miracle?" he asks. Why does he stay? It's a challenge, and he's never taken the easy way in the past. Besides, this is where his company is, and his home.

DeGhelderode's Escuriel is the last play, the only foreign play, and by far the best acted and directed. In a rotten kingdom, the rotten King and his jester await the death of the queen. It has always been a most terrifying play. The King shrinks from his own shadow, in an atmosphere

Experimental plays at

four continents, works away at the Garret Theatre every week, virtually ignored by Toronto critics. He says it's because of the established critics' refusal to review experimental theatre, thus almost suffocating any form of indigenous theatre that could conceivably burst forth in this country. Fortune And Men's Eyes had to be a success in New York before making it in Toronto.

"The country is like a prostitute, with her legs wide open, crossing herself with one hand, and taking with the other," Mr. Herbert bitterly comments. He sees a vast sell-out to the boys down south, a sell-out perpetrated by the powers that be, from the men in government to the limited scope of the newspaper critics, save for Nathan Cohen, whom Mr. Herbert calls the only honest reviewer.

The first play of the one-acters at the Garret Theatre, on Yonge south of Wellesley, is called Doberman, written by David Windsor of Toronto. It deals with two homosexuals living together, who just get on each other's nerves too much one afternoon, and split up. It lacks credibility.

First of all, you didn't get the feeling that they'd been living together for a long time, so we're not struck by the calamity

yond repair.

What does make the play quite good is the attacks and rebuttals, as one complains about the other's manner of walking and sweating, while the other defends himself by saying that people sweat when they get excited, and ridicules his friend's over-sensitive senses.

All the money Mr. Herbert has so far received in royalties from Fortune, has gone into the Garret Theatre. He has

ignored by TO critics

worked as a waiter in restaurants to support his various theatres, and is not above revealing his persecution complex while explaining the struggles undergone to maintain his own theatrical career. He is a homosexual, and has a prison record. Though he won't admit it, he feels this is part of the reason the critics ignore him.

The theme in Fortune And Men's Eyes of a young man's cruel awakening to homosexuality in prison is partly biographical. He cited an example of biased newspaper reporting when he spoke of a story on Fortune's folding recently in

her date to pick her up. It proceeds more logically than the first one, but remains

that can best be described as close to anybody's conception of Hell as has ever been conceived. The depraved King switches places with the unfunny jester, only to find out he wants to remain king, and so has the jester strangled.

One serious objection comes here. In the play, an executioner comes in and does the King's dirty work. After all, the King is a coward. Even the jester has the love of the queen, a claim her husband cannot make. Here we have the King removing his crown and ring and committing the murder himself. Are we to assume that he identifies with the role of the executioner? I can't buy that. Perhaps the person playing the role didn't show up that evening.

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