

To flaunt or not to flaunt . . .

Witty wife

Wit and energy flowed from the stage in the theatre department's third year production of William Wycherley's *The Country Wife*. A classic comedy of the Restoration period, the plot of *The Country Wife* could easily be transferred into a 20th Century sitcom: a man returns from France claiming to be impotent, thereby assuring all husbands he is harmless, thereby allowing him to get more women and headaches than he ever dreamed possible. Things haven't changed at all: sex and madcap humor got laughs in the 17th Century, and three hundred years later we're still chuckling. The more things change . . .

Director Lloy Coutts has enticed enthusiastic performances from all of his actors. Using a bare stage with two backdrops and a minimal amount of props to establish setting, it is the actors who are responsible for maintaining the atmosphere of upper class England in the late 17th Century. The actors capture the style of the elite, acting with a sense of conscious elegance as they perform for the masses. All speak of honor, few have it or want it.

Looking as if they had been frequently worn by real people rather than plucked from the back rooms of the theatre department, all of the costumes suited the characters and the period. No one appeared overly elegant, nor underdressed; all seemed natural, from a 17th Century perspective.

The exception to the costume rule was Mr. Sparkish, the town buffoon. Dressing like a man trying to imitate the 1675 edition of *GQ* and never quite succeeding, Mr. Sparkish is the man trying to fit in but never doing so: all garters and no class. Kevin W. Prentice's performance of Mr. Sparkish, composed of one part outrageous costume, one part infectious laughter and two parts comedy timing, is a hilarious treat. The fact that the handsome Harcourt (Kirk Dunn) is trying to woo away his beautiful fiancée, Alithea (Karen Inwood), does not upset Mr. Sparkish because he assumes his friend is only happy for him. What a fool! What a delight!

Aided by the fact that she was the only actor employing an accent, Clair De Auer makes Mrs. Pinchwife, the country wife of the title, a naive bundle of laughs. Her introduction to the adulterous, cheating, seductive side of married life is the focus of the play as much as Horner's (Sandy MacMaster's) sexual adventures are, and De Auer grabs every laugh she can. One pities the country wife for having married a possessive, dominating husband, but by the end of the play one suspects that she knows how to handle him.

Because the show was intended as a workshop production there was little publicity and only a three night run. But the quality of this production should act as encouragement for the theatre department to advertise and aim for a larger audience. The skill and energy that goes into productions such as *The Country Wife* should be flaunted, not kept hidden.

by Kevin Pasquino

Festy fun

The stage is lit, the audience is waiting and the actors hover in the wings for the word 'go.' It's time to hit the boards.

This year the theatre department is doing so with a vengeance. *Boardwalk: A Festival of Theatre* opens March 11th and runs till the 14th, offering two days and four nights of non-stop performance madness. The festival brings together for the first time two annual theatre department events: the New Play Festival and Student Project Week. The result is a huge and eclectic collection of plays and scenes performed and directed by students.

In the past the two events have been organized and presented individually. The New Play Festival was created to provide an opportunity for student writers to see their work performed. The plays are workshoped by students and presented informally, the main emphasis of the festival being to take new plays from the page to the stage.

This year five new plays are being performed, with a wide range of styles and subject matter. One of the

plays, *Dinah: Queen of the Blues* by Miriam Karvel, is going downtown after its run at York. The play is a musical, based on the life of blues singer Dinah Washington and is tentatively scheduled for production at the Theatre Centre in June. A live band will be supporting the cast during the performance.

Another of this year's playwrights, Alma Subasic, has already seen her play *Initiation Rites* produced in the recent Rhubarb! Festival downtown. Subasic's offering for the New Play Festival is *Amazin' Grace*, a play written with a mixture of verse and dialogue. Sex and violence overpower the relationship of two people in a bluesy, sensual style.

Alternate Walters, an absurd comedy by Robin D. Laws, portrays two people discovering they're characters in an absurdist play. Laws describes it as a reaction to contemporary theatre aesthetics. *Four: Off the Wall* by Jamie Johnson sees four people standing on the window ledge of a building, considering and reconsidering their existences in a psychological examination of their lives. *Breaking Bonds* by Alan Davies explores stylistic structure in the struggle of a young man trapped in the role of his father. All five plays will be performed over the nights of the 11th and 12th in Samuel Beckett Theatre at 7:00, as well as 10:30 a.m. on the 13th and 14th.

Student Project Week is an annual event set up by the theatre department as an opportunity for students to showcase their talents as actors, directors and designers. The students are given total artistic freedom to choose their own plays and scenes for presentation. Nearly 30 projects make up this part of *Boardwalk*, ranging in time from five to 45 minutes and encompassing classical pieces, contemporary work, and presentations of a musical variety. This part of the festival runs on the 13th and 14th, with showtimes at 2:30 p.m. and 7:30 p.m. on both days in Atkinson Theatre. For more information on listings and scheduling check the schedules outside the two theatres.

A lot of people will be confronting boards next week. Perhaps the largest theatre event ever at York, the diversity of this festival promises colour, vitality and plenty 'o fun.



Mixed Blood a bad concoction

By ALEX PATTERSON

Now that the furor surrounding the possible banning of the low-budget New York film *Mixed Blood* has abated somewhat, it is easier to get a proper perspective on both the film and the censorship question. *Mixed Blood* is in the middle of its 3-week "limited exhibition" run at the Bloor Cinema; according to the compromise reached between the distributor and the Theatres Review Branch (née Ontario Censor Board) the film will disappear from the province's screens for ever after the end of next week. At that time a cheer will go up in many quarters: Good riddance!

Originally, the censor board did not want this film about feuding juvenile drug gangs to play in Upper Canada at all. Predictably, the thing became a *cause célèbre*, and once again the board succeeded only in generating undeserved free publicity for an execrable movie (cf. *Pretty Baby*). The question becomes: how do you defend a banned film on the grounds of "redeeming social value" when it is as vile and reprehensible as *Mixed Blood*?

For watching *Mixed Blood*—basically a B-grade shoot-em-up for trendies who want to go slumming—is a truly hateful experience. Lacking even the cheerful vulgarity of John Waters' trash-epics starring Divine, *Mixed Blood* claims to be a black comedy. Black it certainly is, but comedy requires humor, and this film is about as witless as they come. Crudely plotted, ineptly executed, this moronic bloodbath from ex-Andy Warhol henchman Paul Mor-

rissey attempts the unforgivable; it almost gives censorship a good name.

Morrissey—who claims to have voted for Ronald Reagan in the last election only because Mussolini wasn't on the ballot—is no stranger to the trash aesthetic. In 1973 his gift to humankind was *Andy Warhol's Frankenstein in 3-D*—a film similar to this one in that its brutality was surpassed only by its utter wretchedness in cinematic terms. For dropping human entrails into an audience's lap it was unparalleled: *Mixed Blood*, however, can boast no similar thrills. It stands as an example of how a potentially-exciting story can be rendered grindingly tedious in the hands of a hack. Morrissey is a director of the Point-And-Shoot school and hallmarks of his "style" are nonsensical scripts, Amateur Hour acting and abysmal production values. The lighting appears to have been done exclusively with 40-watt bulbs, the sound recording is largely inaudible and a fair proportion of the dialogue consists of characters' instructing each other to Fuck Off.

Much has been made of Marilia Pera's performance as the Earth Mother to the gang of pubescent pushers. It has probably appeared good to certain critics only because everyone around her is so bad. No one could accuse Morrissey of imaginative casting, either; Pera played an almost identical role in the excellent Brazilian film *Pixote*. Here, speaking in heavily-accented English and a great deal of unsubtitled Portuguese, she is undeniably flabbi-ant, but often seems to be struggling to remember her lines.

That the film wasn't forbidden after all by Mary Brown and her crew, was, I suppose, a blow for freedom, although only in the abstract. It is questionable how much richer we are culturally for having been visited by Mr. Morrissey's retch-making "satire." I am reminded of what a television critic said of the first episode of this season's *Saturday Night Live*, in which John and Robert Kennedy conspire to murder Marilyn Monroe: "Bad taste, hell! This is bad humanity!"

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