

GATEWAY TO THE arts

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FRIDAY, DECEMBER 6, 1963

Civic Opera

Paris of 1893 Captured By CanCan

By Bill Stocks

Thursday night at the Jubilee Auditorium, I attended the Edmonton Civic Opera society's production of Cole Porter's *CanCan*. Director Jack Unwin, musical director Herb Jeffery, and choreographer Edelayne Brandt captured much of the romantic, exciting, colorful Paris of 1893. As a play, *CanCan* has a good reputation (it lasted two years on Broadway), and contains many tremendous songs such as "I Love Paris" and "C'est Manifique"—but basically this play is weak. Lack of character definition and an idiotic plot, offers a challenge that only a hard working combination of the very best director and the most excellent cast can overcome. Thursday night these problems were not overcome. The performers were struggling both with the unplugged holes in the script and with their relationships to each other.

Wes Stefan, who played the role of Boris, the Bavarian sculptor, was certainly bouyant; but that was all. He only varied his tone or volume when he was covered up by a gorilla costume. Mr. Stefan failed to "build up" his lines and frequently could not be understood, as he was constantly screaming. I found his excessive strength jarring, and his only major successful moment was a beautifully executed stage fall. I fear that much of Mr. Stefan's "hamming" may be attributed to the direction. Mr. Stefan's friends, the other artists were nondescript, and, with the exception of the Poet, showed not the slightest glimmering of character.

Elsie McNeil, who played Claudine, was not believable. The task of holding her character when acting with Mr. Stefan was too much. The times she tried to compete with him, she failed. Don Arlidge did a poor job as

the critic Jussac. He developed little character. (I was amazed to hear dialogue reveal Jussac was an old man). Mr. Arlidge cannot sing. He murdered the excellent song "Come Along With me." Mr. Arlidge was unsure of himself throughout the play.

Bud McKeen as Judge Forestier was quite believable and straight forward. He had a difficult time bridging the dislike-to-love transition called for in his relationship to Pistache, however it must be pointed out that the script gave Mr. McKeen little assistance.

The difficult female lead of La Mome Pistache was capably played by Vicky Wynnychuk. She is an aggressive young performer with amazing stage presence. However, where was her beautiful singing voice Thursday night? She sang in muddy low tones with a dreadful accent. It was only in a few bars of "Allez-vous-en" that she reverted back to her solid high notes. Miss Wynnychuk also lost meaning in many of her songs, such as in "I Love Paris," as she did not believe what she sang. But, she was attractive and enjoyable, and gave a most creditable performance.

In this production I found many things annoying: The stage slap was pathetic. The photographer's flash pot was either late, so as to be useless, or it did not go off at all. I was offended by the homosexual caricature. The blocking was poor. Musical numbers like, "Never, Never Be an Artists" would have been much more attractive had the cast not marched back and forth in straight lines across the stage. Actors stood in straight lines or in perfect symmetry. Many actors either reacted to a line before it was spoken, or did not react at all! No one on that stage came from anywhere or went anywhere. I did not feel the use of

ARTS CALENDAR

Symphony Concert

Jubilee Auditorium
Sunday, Dec. 8,
3 and 9 p.m.

The Curve - Experiment In Modern Languages

By Manfred H. Rupp

I hate to say so, but last week's double-production of *Die Kurve/ The Curve* at the Studio Theatre seemed to me more of an experiment in modern languages than one in Drama. And while I hesitate to say anything that might sound like the famous last word on this kind of enterprise, I feel, nevertheless, that one good, well worked-out production, in either of the two languages, English or German, would have been worth considerably more than the two half-boiled ones which we saw.

The plot centres about two brothers living at the side of a mountain, who are in the fortunate position of being able to pick their livelihood from a rhubarb patch in the form of wrecked cars. The cars invariably and reliably, drop down from the dangerous road up high, giving brother Ralph opportunity to practice his mechanical skills and incidentally profit from the sale of the rebuilt wrecks. As is the rule with wrecked cars, corpses are contained in them, and generally these corpses are dead. Brother Tony, the poet, looks after them. He composes eulogies, and plants flowers. And, to relieve his slightly troubled conscience, he also composes petitions to the deputy minister of highways to have him do something about that curve in the road. Like maybe put up a sign. When the twenty-fifth corpse drops into the rhubarb, it isn't a corpse at all,

but the deputy minister himself! He miraculously recovers from drop—only to be stabbed to death in the grand finale. By the poet!

POET: HONEST OR DISHONEST?

This is a clever plot, hilarious in a macabre sort of way, and if one remembers that Mr. Dorst is a young German writer, one may enter into some interesting, if damaging allegorical speculations about this road, about the mechanic, and, most of all, about the poet. Yet it is also a weak enough plot to stand or fall with the interpretation given it by the director, and the ability of the main actors to convey the essential fluctuation between honesty and dishonesty in his role as poet.

The German version, directed by Henry Beissel, fell down because of the obvious inexperience of the players. It would be unfair to call it inability, since neither Dieter Schadow, as the mechanic, nor Reinhard Berg as the poet, nor Lou Helbig as the deputy minister have previous stage experience. Considering this, they carried the story as well as could be expected, getting even fairly lively after Lou Helbig got his big feet into the act. I found the costumes quite provocative, with the tails and bowler hats adding a bit of a three-penny-opera air to the revolving developments on stage.

MISCAST ENGLISH VERSION

The fast moving, very realistic and rather more superficial English version, directed by Gordon Peacock, suffered because of a miscast, probably misunderstood, poet. Wilf Rowe, who sounded at best like the salesman of a funeral home who doesn't believe in his product, and whose fierce eyes and frantic jumps have already troubled us to a considerable degree in *The Caretaker*, was here totally out of place. Thus it was left up to the unflinching clowning of Bud D'Amur as the mechanic, to put some credibility, and even a shot of Canadian flavor into this translated piece, and to Ted Kemp, who was trying, I think, a little too hard to imitate the dullness of an average Alberta deputy minister. I should have liked to see Mr. Kemp acting a comment on, rather than an impersonation of, this kind of civil servant; he is certainly capable of doing either.

DORST: SWEATY CLICHES

As for Mr. Dorst's theatre: I find his attempt at not saying anything very specific, his fear of seeing himself pinned down by either admirer or critic, frequently become too obvious, too strained; and the cliché, which he admittedly uses with intention, a little too sweaty. His vague projection of diffuse guilt feelings, his refusal to end a sometimes beautiful crescendo with a smashing bit of satirical comment—these I deem weaknesses. But then, maybe his points in *Die Kurve* is more auto-biographical than one might suspect.

Henry Beissel's translation—and I don't know how closely Bud D'Amur stuck to it—seemed to give the English version a little of the added impetus which it needed, even though the occasional punch, here and there, could have helped in making it a translation not only from one language into another, but from one locale to the other. By the way: I don't think that Shaw means the same in a Canadian context as Schiller does in a German one, at all.

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