

# Shakespeare, or what you will

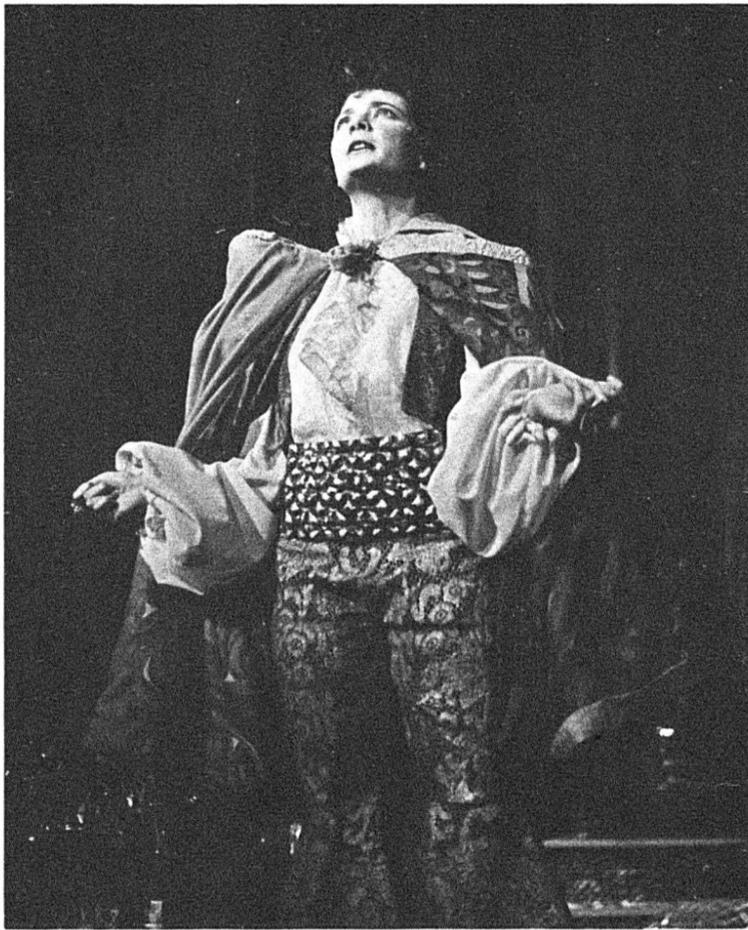
Monday night's opening performance of Studio Theatre's *What You Will* is over. Sitting amidst the dozen or so crumpled copies of would be reviews, I confess, dear reader, that I am still rather confused if not somewhat terrified. *What You Will* was a contemporary "re-vision" of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*. It was almost perverse: It was unmistakably brilliant: It was Shakespeare.

The director of the production was Thomas Peacocke. At one point I was going to say we were watching Peacocke not Shakespeare. After some consideration I am sure that this was not the case. *What You Will* was Mr. Peacocke's re-vitalization of Shakespeare. The noble bard got turned on and though at times it looked like he was having a bad trip, I think he would have been pleased. Shakespeare's fine humour is lost to an enormous extent on today's audiences, as was rather evident Monday night. To relieve this Mr. Peacocke focused the play into a psychedelic terrain which was to the audience both distant and immediate enough to produce the essential mood of "high fantastical" romance. Only with this mood established can the audience be ready to accept the play on the grounds that it was meant to be taken and enjoy it.

The thematic movement of the production was superb. The lighting, setting, costuming, sound and choreography were so carefully and conscientiously intergrated that one could never fail to be amazed at the expanding richness of the play; so rich it was, in fact, that you were never comfortably sure of what Peacocke was trying to do or why. New themes were continually picked up, expanded, left hanging, perhaps to be picked up again. The force of this richness was, to a great extent, the novel insertions of the contemporary into the Elizabethan comedy.

Old puns went by largely unnoticed and were replaced with new ones. Gold became Acapulco. Duke became super-hip. Shakespeare's lyrics were mixed in with songs by Lennon and Donovan. You were never sure whether the background music would next be 'Oh Mistress Mine' or something off Jefferson Airplane's *Surrealistic Pillow*. Cigarettes and Shakespeare. Ambiguous but dynamic.

The play started off with a ballet-like entrance of the cast which, coupled with the use of tapes, music, lighting and echoing voices very effectively introduced the dream-like and delightful spirit of romance that the first half of the play was to follow. Though the characters were frighteningly painted and costumed and the set-



—Peter Emery photo

ting almost grotesquely sinister, the spectacle was enchantingly beautiful. The clown scenes with Sir Toby and Sir Andrew were too humorous and the disguise of Viola as Caesaria too charming for us to suspect anything but a light merry comedy. Then something happened. Perhaps it was the way the light hit Olivia turning her into something less than human. Maybe it was when we noticed that Malvolia was suffering. Perhaps it was perverseness and dishonesty of so much fantasy becoming to large to escape. At any rate something had happened. The sinister and the grotesque of the action became all too apparent. By the end of the play you no longer felt entertained but exploited. When you left the theatre to be confronted by the cast dancing wildly to the Cream's jarring *Strange Brew*, you were spent and bewildered. What exactly was it that you had seen? The dream had turned into a nightmare.

One of them ost impressive parts of the performance was the absolute flowing smoothness of the

action. Timing was exact. So smooth it was that you weren't really irritated by the length of the play and the one or two instances where it dragged. It was so much of a unity that individual performances weren't really noticed, although there was a surplus of very good acting. Nancy Beatty, I think, was the most impressive. Particularly in the first half of the play she gave all that was required of her in her role of Viola-Sebastian. Mel Tuck also filled his role of the clown, Feste, extremely well. A singer he's not but he seems to know how to act. Diakun as Orsino, Carol Harmon as Maria, Don Piper as Fabian and Richard Sutherland as Antonio and Sea Captain were generally quite adequate. Mumford, Versloot and Jay Smith were at times magnificent as they were sometimes stale. Allen Hughes was the only real disappointment. Sound, setting and costuming were without doubt the very best to come out of Studio Theatre, as was probably the play itself.

—Phillip Hinman

## Wild West dies with Jubilaires

Reviving an old musical comedy is always risky, as they tend to wear their age badly. When plot or music become dated only the most imaginative of directors and the most enthusiastic of casts can overcome this setback.

Jubilaires' production of George and Ira Gershwin's *Girl Crazy* graphically bears this out. It is dull, colorless, and utterly worthless.

Jubilaires' are not totally to blame for the sad spectacle now on the SUB theatre stage: the Gershwin have given them little enough to work with. The plot of *Girl Crazy* is too weak to be sustained over the three hours this production runs.

Other shows have succeeded with slimmer plots (witness last year's *Fantastiks*). The major difficulty here is that *Girl Crazy* is a musical comedy with neither significant music nor noticeable

comedy.

Lack of humor is the most evident weakness. Since the basic situation is not in itself particularly comic, the production required abundant use of one-liners and sight gags. Neither were used to an appreciable degree. On the evening that I attended, the audience only laughed at one line: "can't you let bygones be has-beens?" Not very funny, but by that time we were ready to laugh at anything.

The music adequately complimented the humor. It was second-rate Gershwin, flat and unmemorable, interesting only to those with a streak of nostalgia going back to the thirties.

Of the 14 tunes in *Girl Crazy*, only three were notable "I'm Bidin' My Time" is a rather pleasant number sung well by the male quartet at the beginning of Act One. But at the end of Science 1,

these guys came out to sing it again, and we heard it between scenes and during scenes until one was frantic with irritation.

I have never really thought much of "I Got Rhythm". Here, its one distinction is that it has become Ethel Merman's theme song. Anne Wheeler butchered it.

"Embraceable You" was something else again. It is a good tune, well sung and staged by the company. It was the one moment in this production when the chorus caught fire.

Individual performers were unable to rise above the turgid plot and bad music. Anne Wheeler wavered uncertainly over the high notes, often shouting to gloss her lack of control.

She played Kate as that unique character, the bitch with a heart of gold. She snapped and brayed but never succeeded in convincing us.

## Films

Well, folks, your faithful movie reviewer is losing his marbles. I mean, I have this distorted perception of the current American cinema.

If I've been told once, I've been told fifty times: "*Bullitt's* a great film. Take the auto chase! WOW!!! I came over all queasy in the stomach. And to you that's dull?"

"Er, yes", I tend to reply, "vomiting did always seem to me less than a total gas . . ."

At which point people always walk away.

This wouldn't be so bad if I were taking a consistent High Art position, measuring current movies against the masterpieces of world cinema, the films of Kurosawa, Godard, Buneul, Antonioni, Bergman, et. al.

Then I could claim I was helping to maintain Standards. Standards are very important (ask anyone who tends to be appalled by the Current Lack Of). "Take but degree away . . ."

But I can't operate in those terms, because these terrible urges come over me. Take right now: I want to write a quasi-rave review of *Three in an Attic*. Now anyone with any standards at all can see that this is a really rotten film—vulgar, sensational, unenlightened. But . . .

The plot of *Three in an Attic* is of classic simplicity. Christopher Jones, superfrat ("They say he scored fifty times before his sophomore year", they say of him in envious awe), gets "involved" with three girls simultaneously. They find out, and decide to satiate him to death. He survives (barely), decides to hitch up with Nice Blonde Girl, and all is well.

This may not sound precisely promising; indeed, the preview at the Capitol when the *Boston Strangler* graced its screen led me to expect something totally repulsive. Still, I feel—and here's where the question of distorted perception becomes acute—there's more here than you might think.

To begin with, *Three in the Attic* is an American International production. American International put out comparatively low-budget films; the great AI director is Roger Corman, of Edgar Allen Poe fame.

The hallmark of any Corman film is the viewer's uncertainty about whether it's a put-on or not. Is Nancy Sinatra for real in *The Wild Angels*? Is Peter Fonda for real in *The Trip*?

If you take the films as put-ons, you find yourself with about the most fascinating series of anatomies of the American collective semi-consciousness going.

Trendy intellectuals have pretty well agreed that Corman is worth watching. But what about American International's current products?

After all, the male lead of *Three in an Attic* is Christopher Jones, last seen in another AI picture, *Wild in the Streets*.

There he played the supposedly-charismatic teen idol who becomes President of the United States in his early twenties, outlaws old age, and finally faces the possibility of a coup led by ten-year-olds.

The mechanism here involves taking a melodramatic plot which panders to the silliest fears of those uptight about Youth, and subtly undercutting it until both these fears and his equally silly hopes of a certain sort of youth cultist become the satiric target—if you want to take the film that way.

If you don't, you can watch it as pure melodrama and get your money's worth.

The same seems to me to be true of *Three in an Attic*.

It's an objectively devastating look at a completely hollow lot of people who contrive to achieve paths only in their defeats—Jones stumbling out of the attic nearly dead only to be set upon by a rape-conscious gaggle of frat-girls; Mimieux mindlessly watching his destruction because neither he nor she can resolve the impasse which the normality of infidelity is for them; the Sassy Spade Chick suddenly poignant as Project Head-Start kindergarten teacher; the Hippy Chick wondering if she can be both psychedelic and Jewish.

Or am I reading all this into a meretricious, boring film? Is it as bad a film as *Bullitt*? Have I lost touch with cinematic reality? . . . Watch for subsequent thrilling installments.

—John Thompson

It is difficult to determine whether Jim Dearden (as Johnny) was good or not although for his non-descript acting and singing I suspect not. He did little all evening but loiter uncomfortably. One of the chief features of Jubilaires has always been their spontaneity and enthusiasm, which tends to overcome their serious faults. But this performance was dead.

Jim Dearden and Elaine Chris-

tanson did not have the talent to pull it off, and the chorus seemed in constant competition with the orchestra.

Several years ago Jubilaires discontinued writing their own material when the lack of freshness began to turn people's stomachs. Their alternative proves equally bad if they must rummage the thirties for a musical comedy like *Girl Crazy*.

—RON DUTTON