

Moliere's slapstick definitely works

A Doctor In Spite Of Himself
Walterdale
til Oct. 4

review by **Dragos Ruiu**

The play *A Doctor In Spite of Himself*, currently playing at the Walterdale, is quite entertaining. The acting has some rough edges, but the real brunt of the humor is physical slapstick, which was executed commendably.

This 320-year old French comedy by Moliere is about a French peasant who, through a series of accidents, is mistaken for a doctor and must cure a mute girl who isn't really mute. The plot is corny, like the ending, but it's not designed to touch any emotions, just to make you laugh. And that it does.

The physical acting was what really made this play shine. About half the humor was portrayed with body expressions, and director Pierre Bokkor coaxed a great performance from his cast in this area. The slapstick that goes on on-stage is well timed, and almost always brought a laugh from the audience.

Something funny was always going on, on the stage. Between scene changes, the lead's coach would come out and give him a towel-down, advising "Keep going with the left, kid!". Or a stage hand would come out in the middle of a scene and put on a character's beard and mustache. Little touches like this keep you laughing.

The sets and staging are rudimentary, with black and white scenery in contrast with the cast's bright and colorful costumes. The play is very spartan, but the cast, which sometimes doubled for scenery, makes it interesting.

The scenes where the cast played trees (!) was notable. They created the illusion of movement by swaying about and giving the impression of a forest moving around the action. Really effective!

What the cast does not do so well is sing. Fortunately for the audience only one song is sung, at the beginning. It is a shame though, because the synthesizer music of Darren



photo Keith Zukowski

Life is but a masque for Moliere
Knittle was excellent. A first-rate performance is also delivered by Stuart Bentley playing the lead, Sganarelle the wood-cutter cum quasi-crypto-pseudo-doctor.

In amateur theatre, like the Walterdale, the quality of the performance is always a surprise (some bad, some good). This play was a pleasant surprise. They have managed

to dust off the script and make the audience walk out with a smile. For less than the price of a movie, the Walterdale gives you a lot of entertainment value with this play.

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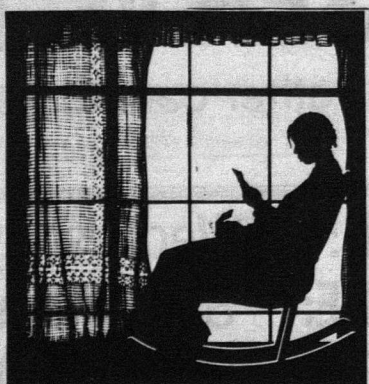
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