

And they rehearsed, too!

Hot I Baltimore really registers

By MANDA VRANIC

The way director Steven Gregg explains it, *Hot I Baltimore* sounds like an exercise in character study. The Lanford Wilson play, being presented by the Theater Department, concerns a hotel which, we are told, is about to be torn down, and the people who will be most affected by it. The impending destruction provides, according to Gregg, a sense of urgency which forces the characters to develop relationships they have hitherto ignored.

The production is a workshop for third year students. Gregg, who is working toward an MFA in directing, chose *Hot I* to give students a chance to focus in on characterization and relationships. A good deal of rehearsal time was given over, according to Gregg, to exploring motivation and desires, in order to gain a fuller understanding of the interactions and relationships that emerge during the course of the play.

But there is a lot of comedy in this Obie-award winning drama. Gregg

stresses that the comedy is derived from the characters, not necessarily from their situation. Together with the development of strong emotional ties, it is Gregg's intention to leave the audience with a feeling of optimism for the future of not only the hotel, but the characters.

Hot I Baltimore plays at Atkinson Theater, March 26-28 at 8 p.m. with a March 27 matinee at 3 p.m. Admission is free, although donations would be entirely appropriate. Support living artists.

Radiguet sinks in pool of obscurity but Sky's the limit in muddy script

By REBECCA CANN

Art, love and romance splutter and fade to the tune of indifference in Sky Gilbert's new play *Radiguet*. As an exercise in theatrical imagination and ingenuity the Buddies in Bad Times Theatre's production has memorable moments but they cannot rescue the play from the depths of its obscurity.

Playing at the Poor Alex Theater, *Radiguet* concerns the romance between writer-poet Raymond Radiguet and writer-artist-filmmaker Jean Cocteau in the midst of the surrealist and dada movements of the early 1920s. It is difficult to see where the romance lies. Gilbert's muddy and incohesive script makes extensive program notes essential to any understanding of the play. The significance of the two men's relationship remains a mystery, with little likelihood of a solution.

Romance is non-existent, the common ground of art seems irrelevant and the question of love is never broached. If their homosexuality is the key (which seems unlikely considering the obviousness of the publicity), it, like everything else, is treated with grand indifference. All that is left is some slick directing by Gilbert of one or two isolated but mind-sparking phrases, several pointless scenes and plenty of emotionally dead air.

The play is made more irrelevant: it becomes difficult to believe anything is significant to Cocteau, least of all *Radiguet*. Alan Rosenthal (Cocteau) prances and tiptoes across the set, poised in a never-ending series of winged stances. His fingers and wrists grace the air as he smiles ingratiatingly in an unsuccessful attempt to charm. The lack of style in Rosenthal's affectations must have Cocteau spinning in his grave.

The power and intensity of Eddie Roy's *Radiguet* contrasts sharply with Rosenthal's performance. With

lightning speed and fiery temperament he bounces from crass and sulky schoolboy one moment, to keenly insightful artist the next. Roy rides a wave in his performance, flashing and spitting, and it is disappointing that the irrelevance of the play restrains him from reaching the crest.

Jennifer Phipps doubles as Mother Cocteau and Beatrice Hastings, creating two diverse and clear-cut characters. Unfortunately the purpose of these characters is never clarified and Phipps' expertise is wasted.

Radiguet's mainspring of life comes from the creative verve of set and costume designer Mary Kerr and lighting designer Patsy Lang. A difficult workspace at the best of times, the Poor Alex has been transformed by the work of these two women into an Aladdin's cave of theatrical magic and delight. The white-on-black set is exquisite in its simple line drawings.

Reminiscent of Picasso and Cocteau's own work, the set surrounds and engulfs the audience with stars and clouds drooping overhead in unpretentious beauty. Lang's lighting sets off the visual qualities of Kerr's work with color and life of its own. Ranging from the eerie grimness of ultraviolet to the sparkling brightness of white Christmas lights, Lang uses her lighting to create the atmosphere the play itself lacks.

The harmony between lighting and set in *Radiguet* is a theatrical dream come true as it temporarily relieves the irritation provided by the erratic and directionless script. The wide-eyed wonder and soft-hearted chuckles this fine work draws, however, cannot compensate for the feeling of indifference towards the central relationship of the play. Both *Radiguet* and Cocteau were interesting people in their own right, but it remains to be seen whether or not their relationship is worth contemplation. The heart of the matter, if it exists, has yet to be unearthed.



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