

# Country Wife divorced

Stage 74's opening presentation of William Wycherley's 1675 play, *The Country Wife*, was a rather clumsy experience Wednesday night. *The Country Wife* is the first public offering on the thrust stage in the Drama Department's new home in the Fine Arts Building. As will all opening ventures and shakedown operations this opening was fraught with disturbances.

The new theatre appears to be no blessing at all. It is an architectural botch which creates a great many unnecessary difficulties in staging and lighting the production, to say nothing of the bench rock seating arrangements. It is not a comfortable experience in the new theatre and that factor places extraordinary demands on the drama: it must be constantly engrossing if it is going to take one's mind off of one's arthritic hip.

Normally one would think that a Restoration comedy would suit the bill admirably. *The Country Wife* is a racy delight that dwells on cuckoldry and the king of sports and the sport of kings. The play's credentials bear an air of immorality about them. Macaulay, in all his fervent Victorian sense of propriety once observed: "In truth Wycherley's indecency is protected against the critic as a skunk is protected against the hunters. It is safe, because it is too filthy to handle and too noisome to approach."

The central conceit of the play concerns a rogue by the name of Horner. Through the help of an unscrupulous surgeon Horner manages to convince his friends and acquaintances that he has become impotent, a veritable eunuch due to an unfortunate combination of venereal disease and an incompetent French surgeon. Once this story is abroad jealous husbands feel safe in placing their wives in Horner's caring hands. This presents Horner with a veritable Harem as the women each take him as a lover when the secret is revealed.

Trouble begins when Marjory Pinchwife, the recently married country wife of the title falls in love with Horner. Marjory finds her jealous husband to be something of a spoil-sport and a Puritan. She soon manages to trick her husband into delivering her to Horner's lodgings. A brief acquaintance with Mr. Horner that she must come to the city and rid herself of her musty husband. This is not to be since Horner isn't the marrying kind and the honour of several women are at stake. Marjory isn't allowed to tell her tale and she gets stuck with her jealous husband while Horner is free to go on in his merry cuckolding way, living off the shade of his reputation as a eunuch. Pinchwife himself suffers the most. He will never know for sure what happened in Horner's lodgings.

*The Country Wife* is an elegantly wrought comedy with a plot that is clearly conceived and executed. Much of the inspiration and the material was drawn from Moliere's *The School for Wives*. The most obvious difficulty that such a play presents is the question of style. The style must reflect the colour, manners, and wit of the Restoration period. It is a difficult period to capture. Historically there are many floral embellishments that we could identify, such as wigs, canes, handkerchiefs, and snuff-boxes. Unfortunately the temptation to rely heavily on the intrinsic charm of such distant manners to carry a

show is difficult to resist.

Wycherley's wit is somewhat strained, as if each clever epigram and similitude had been laboured over. They are clever but they require delicate timing and a proper set-up if they are going to work properly. Dissembling is a fine art that requires long study. This production lacked the caress of Wycherley's wit and reared from joke to joke with unseemly haste. It was a kind of comic punchline-hopping. This kind of pacing indicated a lack of faith in the script's ability to work for itself.

The mannered style of movement that was injected into this production sprang out at one like a collection of poses culled from theatre history textbooks on the Restoration. All the bowing the handkerchief flutters, all the peacock strutting were there. The imposition of so much business that was supposedly to justify the movements of characters on stage was quite unnecessary, especially when they ran contrapuntal to the script's intentions. Far too often were moments made to carry immense expressions of the Restoration style. There was an overabundance of style but previous little of the Restoration spirit.

The acting on the whole suffered from this straightjacket. Little faith had been placed in the script's own capacity for exaggeration, burlesque, parody, ridicule and satire. Too much faith had been placed in the manner of style to put the sparkle in the diamond and carry the play.

As the cuckold-maker, Jack Horner, David Barnet proved to be most engaging. He certainly had more success with his material than some other managed. His failing was in ignoring the sheer human joy of his venture and trying to communicate everything through the medium of style. The stylistic responses were all too patently artificial which makes it very difficult to empathize with Horner. Here an essential delight of the play is lost for the lack of opportunity of empathy. Horner is supposed to be the kind of lovable rogue that we can cheer on and at the same time envy in a secret way. It is a real Clark Gable part.

In sharp contrast to Barnet's style was the distant and rough hewn quality of James DeFelice as Pinchwife, the but newly-married rogue now living in fear for his wife's virtue. The almost total lack of style made him simply a loveable buffoon that nobody felt guilty about laughing at. He was so frenetic as to prevent himself from

acting with anyone except himself. His voice has a sandpaper quality with little versatility which becomes boring in long scenes.

Keith Digby was splendid as Sir Jasper Fidget. He has a light comic hall touch that is well suited to Wycherley's wit. Jim Dougal could have been perfect as the crooked physician. He had just the right sense of the quack in his characterization. Unfortunately he showed the occasional tendency to garble his lines and loses some of their wit in that manner. Bob Baker was outrageous as Sparish. He simply went too far as a fop and ended up as a drag queen that made his amorous adventures unsupportable as a subplot concept.

The sole character amongst the men who seemed all of a place was Jeremy Hart as Harcourt. He has the voice, the manner and the natural grace of wit and character to make his lines work for him.

Amongst the women there was massive confusion about feminine style in Restoration productions. Kathy Green was quite caught out as the country wife Marjory, having a crack at city more. She is certainly fetching enough in the part but there were too many elegant edges when what was needed was a touch of buxom country girl basic lust.

Sandee Guberman proved quite splendid as Lady Fidget and seemed alone in capturing the spirit of the play although she was given to the occasional excess. Shelah Magill seemed hopelessly miscast as Althea, Pinchwife's sister and seemed quite lost in the toils of the subplot romance between her and Harcourt and Sparkish.

Fiona Law and Susan Ferley were sadly neglected and left to thrive as squeamish caricatures that were quite disappointing. They seemed to have been rather overlooked by the director.

John Terfloth's direction of this play is top heavy with a style consciousness that distracts from the play and its native wit. Terfloth has chosen his milieu with care, established it, embellished it and then added an occasional improvement until the whole scene is very heavy-handed. Some of these difficulties may possibly be traced to the actual theatre itself. Every attempt was made to deny the character of a thrust stage at the expense of negating its advantages. To accomplish this it has been necessary to manufacture movement to keep the scene flowing and busy work to keep the actors lively. This eventually became

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## Next at Theatre 3

From February 20th to March 3rd. Theatre 3 is presenting its latest production of the season, two Canadian one-acts, *SYLVIA* and *DISMISSAL LEADING TO LUSTFULNESS*.

*SYLVIA*, by Canadian playwright James Osborne, is an award winning examination of an unusual triangle. It is a tense dark play, dealing with real and modern people in real and very modern situations. *SYLVIA* is being given its world premiere at THEATRE 3.

*DISMISSAL LEADING TO LUSTFULNESS*, by Edmontonian Thomas Whyte, is a more ironic look at an emotional quadrangle. The play shows the adventures of a man

in a late Victorian rooming house, following the loss of his job. Although *DISMISSAL LEADING TO LUSTFULNESS* has been seen on BBC television and heard on CKUA, this will be its Canadian stage premiere.

*SYLVIA* is being directed by Mark Schoenberg, with Judith Mabey as 'Diane' and Hutchison Shandro as 'John'. *DISMISSAL LEADING TO LUSTFULNESS* is being guest directed by Kenneth Agrell-Smith, with Conrad Boyce, Jonathan Harrison, Rhonda Hidson, Jean McIntyre, Wilf Rowe and Jennifer Webber in the cast. Both productions are designed by Karen Waidmann.

## Writers unite!

What do Norman Cousins, Robie Macauley, and Judson Jerome have in common? Can't even begin to guess, huh? Well, Cousins, Editor of Saturday Review/World; Macauley, Fiction Editor of Playboy; and Jerome, noted poet and Writer's Digest columnist will be the final judges in Writer's Digest's 40th annual Creative Writing

competition.

The contest is open to anyone wishing to enter original, unpublished stories, articles, and/or poetry. \$7,500 in prizemoney, divided among 301 prizes, is available.

The deadline is May 31, 1974 and full details can be obtained from the main bulletin board in the Gateway office, Rm. 282 SUB.



## ORACLES

theatre lives

*How the Other Half Loves* by Alan Ayckbourn. Directed by John Neville. Opening at the Citadel February 9. Not many seats available for the run but lots for the Preview on Thursday and some for Friday. Student prices for the previews are \$1.50. Directors and actors will be on hand afterwards for discussion.

*The Fantasticks* directed by Peter Feldman at the Walterdale Playhouse. Saturday, February 9 till 16. Curtain at 8:30. Tickets are available at the Bay for \$2.50 except Friday and Saturday when they are \$3.00. Address is 11407-107 St. You'll have to scramble for tickets as the seats are few and far between.

*The Country Wife* by Wycherley, directed by John Terfloth, February 6 till February 16. In the new thrust theatre in the Fine Arts Building. A restoration farce of zest and high theatre. University Students are admitted free if you can get a ticket from Room 3-146. Nightly at 8:30 EXCEPT FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 8 at 9:00 P.M.

Theatre 3 will open its bill of two Canadian one-acts on February 20. *Sylvia* by James Osborne and *Dismissal Leading to Lustfulness* by Tom Whyte will run until March 3. Direction is by Mark Schoenberg and Ken Agrell-Smith. Tickets are available from Theatre 3 or the McCauley Plaza Box Office - telephone 422-4411.

*Self Accusation* by Peter Handke. A short one-act directed by Don Bouzek at Studio Theatre. Saturday and Sunday at 8:30 p.m. Admission is free as this is part of the requirements for an MFA in directing.

easy on the ears

Tuesday, February 12 there will be a recital of Chamber music by Students in the Department of Music at 8:00 p.m. in Con Hall. Admission is free.

Wednesday, February 13 thy Edmonton Chamber Music Society presents the University of Alberta String Quartet. Members only. At 8:30 p.m.

Dave Wright, one of the few remaining folksingers from the '60's has been lured out of retirement to play a concert for the Edmonton Folk Club at Garneau United Church (84th Ave., 112th Street) this Sunday night (Feb. 17th). Dave was one of the first acoustic musicians to ever play at a Rock Festival; his performance in 1970 at the Kinsmen Field House, as the middle act between two rock groups was described by a Gateway reviewer as 'the highlight of the evening.' Classical-folk-etc. guitarist Allen Bell will be the backup act. Admission is \$1.25. Edmonton Folk Club members, 50 cents. Starts around 8:00 p.m.

poetry reading

Friday, February 22, Canadian poet, Dale Zieroth will read from his works. At the Centennial Library.

Canada's leading group of experimental poets will be appearing on Campus Tuesday, February 12. B.P. Nichol, Paul Dutton, Steve McCaffery and Rafael Barreto-Rivera will read at 12:30 noon in Lecture theatre 1 in the AV centre.

for the eyes

University Art Gallery and Museum, Feb. 3-28, 1974. 1. Don Mabie and Wendy Toogood - Quilts and Drawings. 2. Jacques Hnizdovsky - an exhibition of thirty woodcuts by the Ukrainian master printmaker. The University Art Gallery is located directly south of the Faculty Club on Campus, just off Saskatchewan Drive.

Latitude 53 is presenting the works of fourteen artists from Calgary. February 1-15. Paintings, prints and ceramics.