

Arts

clowning around with shakespeare

by Laura Martins

The idea of a clown-based theatre company performing Shakespeare may sound a tad ambitious.

Yet, Theatre Columbus' production of *Twelfth Night*, currently playing at the Poor Alex Theatre, is an appropriate piece for a company accustomed to "clowning around." To date, Theatre Columbus has produced original work, drawing on the elements of commedia dell'arte, clown, buffoon, melodrama, tragedy and burlesque. Their present venture into classical territory has proved a success.

It revolves around a group of lively characters, most of whom are mistaken for someone else. Orsino, the duke of the mythical land of Illyria is head-over-heels over Olivia, a proud countess. Olivia couldn't care less for Orsino. Viola enters the scene, disguises herself as Orsino's messenger and inadvertently charms Olivia instead. The plot is further complicated by a group of revellers living in Olivia's palace.

What makes this production so interesting is that the actors interpret their characters through a wide repertoire of physical gestures, fully exploiting the comic possibilities made explicit and implicit in Shakespeare's text.

Gestures are cleverly exaggerated without becoming excessive. A simple bow is transformed into an elaborate gesture, rendering the act itself absurd.



Kevin Bundy (l), Marthe Ross (c) and Maggie Huculak (r) star in Theatre Columbus' *Twelfth Night*.

Conventional props are sometimes abandoned as well. The duel scenes are expertly mimed, where jabbing fingers effectively replace the need for swords.

The primary revellers and pranksters in the play, Maria (Ann-Marie MacDonald), Sir Toby Belch (Michael Simpson) and Sir Andrew Aguecheek (Oliver Dennis) deliver the funniest perfor-

mances. MacDonald handles two roles, Maria and Antonio. Her colourful portrayal of Maria is accentuated by her animated facial expressions and hip-swaying demeanour. Despite her slight figure, she succeeds in the role of Antonio as well.

Despite the fact that the court jester Feste (Patricia Hamilton), was intended by Shakespeare to

be the real jester in the play, the other characters also reveal themselves as clowns. Simpson plays the boisterous Sir Toby with swaggering ease. Dennis is charming as Sir Toby's dim-witted, yet adorable drinking pal Andrew Aguecheek. Fortunately, both these performances outweigh Hamilton's rather uninspiring portrayal.

The revellers are counter-balanced by Malvolio, played by Diego Matamoros (who also co-directs), who is very effective as Olivia's vain attendant. It is particularly hilarious when Matamoros struts about in his cross-gartered yellow stockings, sporting shimmering bikini underwear.

A crucial point in the play is Malvolio's imprisonment. Malvolio, like most Puritans, has the sneaking suspicion that somewhere, somehow, someone is enjoying themselves and threatens to have Sir Toby and Sir Andrew ousted from Olivia's palace. In turn, Sir Toby and Maria plot Malvolio's humiliation and punishment.

It would have been a more thoughtful production if directors Leah Cherniak and Matamoros explored the tragic potential implicit in the prank played on Malvolio. But considering how Cherniak and Matamoros focus on the comedy aspects throughout, a disturbing conclusion was probably not desirable.

The set consisted of an imposing concrete facial sculpture situated at the far end of the stage and two concrete lounge seats occupying opposite sides of the stage. This minimalist set allowed ample space for the actors' physical comedy without detracting from the play as a whole. The music, provided by guitarist Larry Louis, is a satisfying addition to an innovative and humorous production.

Twelfth Night runs until March 25 at the Poor Alex Theatre.

breaking free from male ideals

"... Historically, women were, and in many instances still are, bound to the peripheral regions of an art world and society built upon exclusion and male ideals."

by Nancy Bevan

Crayola bursts of paper drapery draw the eye across the room and scribble on the wall, while supervised by two Scottish grandmothers. Explorations of personal, feminine and artistic identities form the *Ties That Bind: A Common Thread*, an exhibition of installations presented by the Atkinson Festival of Fine Arts (Founders Gallery, March 1-15, 1990). Carol Laing, Jean Maddison and Yvonne Singer, colleagues in the visual arts faculty of Atkinson College,

each provide a unique perspective of their experiences as children, daughters, mothers — women.

Quick. Name 10 famous male artists from the last century to the present. Okay, now name 10 famous female artists. Tough, huh?

According to the exhibition curator, Cliff Ladwos, "Historically, women were, and in many instances still are, bound to the peripheral regions of an art world and society built upon exclusion and male ideals." These three women artists work in a media which challenges and investigates

this tradition, using childhood and historical images within a modern, adult context.

Remember how deliciously overwhelming it was to step into a large, ornate theatre for the first

The illusions of light and shadow created on the paper forms reflect the illusionary elements of the children's pantomime theatre in England from which the artist took her inspiration.

experiences, the artist prefers to let the symbolic elements of the piece suggest many possible stories, like a vignette.

Laing's *Conversation piece: Proof Prints for Five of Them Demasked* (1989) has an interesting story of its own. Canadian history majors not included, raise your hand if you have ever heard of the "home children" phenomenon from the turn of the century? Recent research and an old trunk led to Laing's discovery that both her Scottish grandmothers were orphans, exiled to Canada from Great Britain along with many others to begin a new life.

Their portraits are cut up or blotted over and presented with those of three contemporaries — avant-garde but little-known Russian artists — and bordered by period wallpaper and Victorian stencils.

As the artist explains, these "revolutionaries and refugees" represent the struggle towards establishing her identity as a woman artist "talking back to a dominant and patriarchal (art) history."

While "the common thread" of this exhibition links these women personally as faculty members, artistically as creators and historically and socially in terms of subject matter, the weave is loose enough to allow for each artist's individuality. Their contributions may also prove that, although male dominance in the world of art has had women in a bind for a long time, women artists today have all the talent it will take to break free.



time: the lights, the hush and the glorious sweep of curtain wrapped themselves around the promise that something wonderful and magical was about to unfold in front of you.

The dynamic shapes and colours these memories evoke are successfully captured in Maddison's paper, canvas and acrylic construction, "Theatre I" (1985). Crimson swags and aqua pleats frame towering blue crayons rendered in an almost primitive, style.

The theme of childhood is continued in Singer's "isn't your mother beautiful" (1990). Scrawled across one wall, this phrase provides the trigger for a rich variety of interpretation on the viewer's part. A little red chair is echoed on the floor by a chair designed in broken glass — or is it a dress? A falling orange extension cord is witness to the 'charged' emotions in some fragile mother/daughter relationships. Although created from personal

TUESDAY
DISCOUNT FOR
YORK STUDENTS

WEDNESDAY
2 FOR 1
WINGS

(WITH YORK ID)

MARCH 14-17: NIGHTFLY

Billy Barroo's

hythm & brews

CORNER OF
DUFFERIN & STEELES
660-0056