

Brecht on Brecht

Studio Theatre is presenting their final production of the season, *Brecht on Brecht*, in Theatre 1 of the audio-visual wing in the Humanities Centre. Bring a pillow, it's an absolute necessity as the theatre is without chairs.

Brecht on Brecht seems a curious choice for closing the season. It is not really a play at all but rather a portrait of the artist, both as an artist and as a humanitarian socialist. George Tabori had translated and arranged fragments from Brecht's long career until the poems and dramatic observations create a montage which gives some focus to the forces which shaped Brecht and his art but mostly it defines the essential nature of the man.

Brecht was one of the more prolific dramatists of his time. His early work was heavily influenced by expressionist techniques which marked such plays as *Baal*. His Marxist inclinations first became obvious in 1928 with his *The Threepenny Opera*, a satirical attack on bourgeois society. For this musical he collaborated with Kurt Weill who was to become a frequent collaborator in the later productions.

In 1933, Brecht fled Hitler and went to Scandinavia which he fled in 1941 when Germany overran Denmark. During his exile he wrote many of his best works such as *Mother Courage and The Good Woman of Setzuan*. While in the States he continued to write such plays

An evening with Chekhov

An Evening with Chekhov will be presented on April 4, 5, and 6 in Studio Theatre, University of Alberta. It will consist of three one act plays by the famous Russian author and playwright Anton Chekhov and will be directed by M.F.A. directing student Martie Fishman.

The plays include: *The Swan Song*, *The Reluctant Tragedian* and *The Jubilee* or as it more commonly known *The Anniversary*. Chekhov known mostly for his tragic mood pieces such as *Three Sisters*, was also the writer of many one act farces.

Both *The Reluctant Tragedian* and *The Jubilee* are high powered farces which not only demonstrate Chekhov's theatrical sense of humour but also reflect some of the pre-occupations and themes found in his more serious work. *Swan Song* is described by the author as a dramatic study and deals with an old actor, alone in an empty theatre who, with the old prompter tries to come to terms with his past.

Tickets are FREE and will be available at the door.

as the *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui* and *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*.

Brecht's sojourn in the United States was not as pleasant as it might have been. Having fled Hitler twice he found himself before the House UnAmerican Activities Committee where he was held accountable for his Marxist inclinations.

Brecht eventually returned to Germany in 1949 and established the Berliner Ensemble which was to become one of the most widely respected theatre companies in the world. With the Ensemble and his wife Helene Weigel in roles such as *Mother Courage* was able to expound and make felt his powers as a dramatist and as a dramatic thinker.

As a theorist Brecht's most telling influence on the theatre was to counter balance the American misinterpretation of the Stanislavsky acting method. Instead of having his actors be the characters he wanted them to stand outside them so that an attitude towards the character's psychology could be discerned. By use of this alienation effect Brecht hoped his audiences would react critically to the human drama rather than identifying with the characters involved.

Brecht was at his best a didactic writer and wanted his audience not only listen to a message but react critically to his thesis. In spite of his missionary zeal Brecht concentrated on creating characters that were complex and vibrantly human, never allowing his characters to become two-dimensional representations of his social thesis.

Brecht's writings have been divided into five parts in this production. In the first Brecht speaks about himself even when he was yet unborn as in *Song About My Mother*. The observations in the section of *Theatre Excursions* is perhaps the most revealing as in his comments *On Critics* and his anecdote about a bit-part actor whose work Brecht admired. In *The Old Hat* Brecht expresses his wonder and admiration at the work of a dedicated actor.

In exile Brecht speaks with a wry but heavy heart. He relates the nature of exile with the lucidity of an exquisite parable. Exile was a worry for Brecht but it was not an unhonoured state as his works *The Burning of the Books* and *Visit to the Vanished Poets* demonstrates.

The fourth part, written on the wall, rings with timeless questions, as old as history itself, which are still unanswered. Here he speaks of the people and their confusion about the forces which rule their destiny as in *Concerning the Infanticide*, *Marie Farrar* and *Bad Times*.

The *Mask of Evil* speaks of the vile nature of men and his endless capacity for mindless exploitation and justification by scape goat. His one-act *The Jewish Wife* illuminates the cataclysmic bind a great many Jewish

people were caught up in Hitler's time. *Envoy* sends a shuddering farewell reminder that the forces that create the milieu for such activities are still very much alive.

Brecht on Brecht then, is more a portrait of the man than a play. But what of the production. It is an interesting evening with the spoken word but it sadly lacks the dynamism of a dramatic work. Gordon Peacock has directed his actors rather than the material.

There is little question that it is a splendid journey man acting exercise for the acting class but it is seriously flawed as such in that most of the material was written for male voices. In class with one man and five women it is inevitable that the search for suitable material is almost self-defeating. I should very much have liked to have seen all of the women in this year's company speaking lines written for women and of substantial size. For the most part the women had to strive to bring the poetry alive, the man certainly lay beyond them.

All of the company have their moments but they remain fragmented and are never given the opportunity to come together and act as a company.

Brecht on Brecht is staged much like reader's theatre without the books. It is appropriate to the man and his material, a concept which designer Lucinda Zuk has both embraced and honoured with suitable simplicity. The whole thing is not exciting but it is genuinely interesting. It is as interesting as any glimpse at a genius can be. The acting is below par only because for the women most of the emphasis is on the poetry rather than the man. Hopefully they will have something which they can rise to in their futures.

Walter Plinge

Tequila
Sauza
makes
every
party
a
fiesta!



ORACLES

theatre lives

Citadel has an incredible double bill of One-acts lined up for its April 20 opening. John Neville will direct and star in *Oedipus Rex*, the closest thing there is to the original tragedy. Also featured will be Mary Savidge as Jocasta and Roland Hewgill as Creon. Also on the bill is an original rock musical based on Moliere's frantic farce, *The Tricks of Scapin*. Richard Uozounian's *Scapin* will be directed by Tibor Seheregyhazi and feature Douglas Chamberlain as Scapin. Also in the cast are Trudy Young and Robin Ward. Musical direction will be by Peter Yakimovich and the choreography will be by Danny Siretta. Tickets are going like hotcakes so the best chance to see this double treat is at the previews on Thursday and Friday, April 18 and 19. Previews offer the student the incredible bargain price of \$1.50. Directors and cast will remain after the show to answer any questions that the audience may want to ask or talk about. You'll have to hurry for them too.

Gordon Peacock will be directing *Brecht on Brecht* in Studio Theatre's last production of the season. The play opens March 28. Students are permitted one free ticket if they can produce their I.D. card. Box Office is located in room 3-146 of the New Fine Arts Building. Office hours are 9 to noon and 1 - 4:30 in the afternoon. You'll have to be quick.

Please note the unusual location for this production. The play will be staged in Theatre 1, in the A/V Wing of the Humanities Centre. Use the second floor entrance.

Studio Theatre will be the home for three one-act plays by Anton Chekhov. Direction will be by M.F.A. candidate, Martie Fishman. Admission is free. Showtimes are 8:00 p.m. Thursday, April 4; 7:00 p.m. and again at 9:30 p.m. on Friday, April 5; and 8:00 p.m. on Saturday, April 6.

ballet

The Jubilee Auditorium will be hosting Les Grands Ballets Canadiens, Monday, April 15. It should be a real spectacular evening. It is the last event in the ballet season so count your shekels and get down to the Box Office at the Bay as soon as you can.

film fare

Stanley Kubrick's fine *2001: A Space Odyssey* is at Student Cinema this weekend.

easy on the ears

Mike Giles, an unusually creative musician, will be playing this Sunday night for an Edmonton Folk Club concert. Mike is the only musician who can fit both categories of country and jazz. He specializes in his own songs and in unusual jazz arrangements of songs by writers such as Neil Young and Jesse Winchester. Complementing his interesting guitar improvisations is an equally free flowing singing style.

Mike Giles will be playing at Garneau Church Hall, 84th Avenue and 112 Street, this Sunday night (April 6th) starting at 8:00 p.m. Admission is \$1.25. 75 cents for Folk Club members. Back up act is Larry Saidman.

Tuesday night the Edmonton Folk Club will have a workshop on humour and satire in folk music. Held at Garneau Church Hall, 84th ave and 112 street. Admission by donation. Begins around 8:00.

The Edmonton Chamber Music Society will be putting the finish to their season with a concert by Canada's Orford Quartet. They will play Mozart's *Quartet in D Minor, K 421*; Lutowski's *Quartet*; and Brahms's *Quartet in C Minor, Op. 51, No. 1*. The concert is scheduled for Wednesday, April 3 in Con Hall. Admission to the concert is by season membership. The Society will be selling tickets for the new season at the door.

miscellany

Watch out for Spring. It's here, you know.

The Student Union is currently hosting an Easter Sale of Crafts in the SUB Art Gallery. Some very interesting work is on display. You might even find something you'd like for your home.

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