

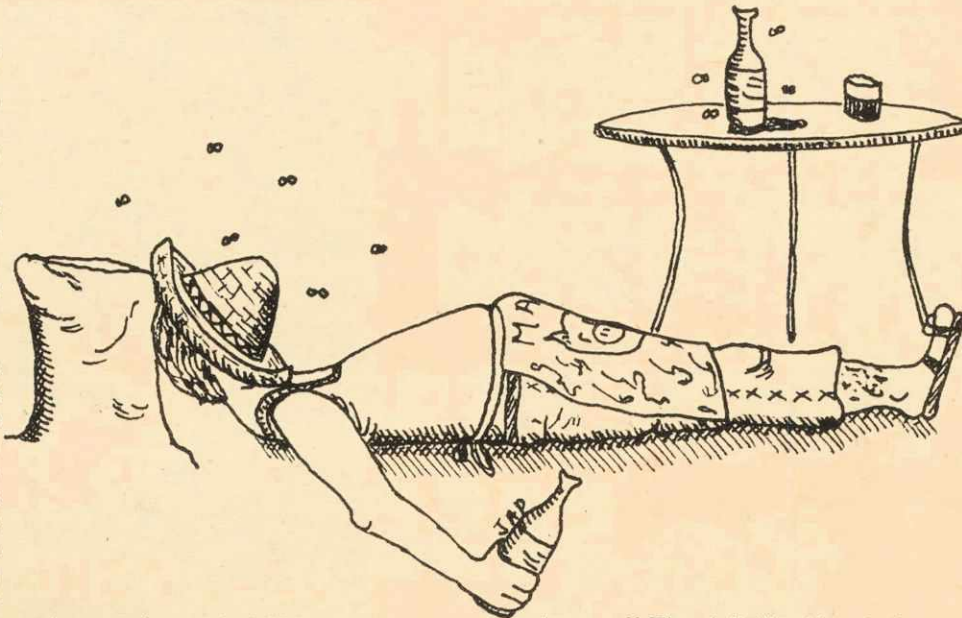
Scapin — a charming comedy

by Judith Pratt

In a completely different dramatic vein from the Winter Repertory season, Neptune's **Scapin** opened to a full house on Saturday night. Enchanting the varied audience with ribaldry, slapstick humour, and puns, this adaptation of the French playwright Moliere's seventeenth-century comedy succeeds in maintaining the original aura as well as injecting it with new avenues of humour.

Under John Wood's direction, the play presents a series of situations that twist, transform and resolve into a multitude of odd shapes, each offering the audience a fresh opportunity for laughter. The original French parlour is now the patio of a Mexican canteen, where Richard Greenblatt as Scapin and Frank MacKay as Carlo the waiter are enjoying the relaxing siesta. The evolution from snoring nonchalance to spasmodic chaos is sudden and makes the general pace of the remainder of the play.

As with most parlour dramas, marriage plays the major role in plot. The preliminary calmness of the canteen is interrupted by the entrance of Craig Gardner as Sylvester, the minstrel servant of Argante's an affluent and imposing member of the community. Argante's son, Octavio, has, as Sylvester recites, married an unknown girl who enchanted him with her pure display of sorrow while weeping over the corpse of an old woman. When faced with the proximity of his father's ship, just returning from Havana, Octavio, played wonderfully by Lee J. Campbell, quakes and quivers and finally begs Scapin to help him bear



Argante's wrath. With exaggerated timidity and mannerisms acutely reflecting his childish nature, Campbell's Octavio allows Greenblatt's Scapin the opportunities for flaunting his impish yet cunning intelligence. Professing that there is "nobody to equal yours truly when it comes down to scheming, or a little manipulation", Scapin designs a pathetic story, determining to strike at the miserly father's pride and stature in the community. With a constantly fluctuating and breaking voice, Octavio leaves the scheming to Scapin and the guitar-strumming Sylvester, who captivates the audience with his facial gestures and verbal sparring.

Octavio announces his bride Hyacintha to Scapin and Sylvester, and here John Wood's adaptation becomes especially noticeable. Employing varying metre and phonetic puns, Campbell excites laughter with lines such as "Don't cry, Hy- I could never bear to see you-

unhappy." The doll-like Hyacintha, played by Sharron Timmins, is exaggeratingly sweet, and her rasping voice is the perfect foil for Octavio's boyish timidity. Both waddle off the stage, generating laughter from both the audience and Scapin and Sylvester.

Mimicking the exploitive American businessmen who plagued Mexico and the Caribbean in the 1940's and 1950's, Octavio's father, superbly played by Joan Orenstein, returns and confronts Scapin and Sylvester with the knowledge that he has brought a bride for his son. In a wide Panama hat and an over-sized white suit, made even more ridiculous by a bright peacock tie and large sun glasses, Orenstein's Agantena is an omniscient presence throughout the play and justifies the hilarious meekness of his son. He eventually succumbs to Scapin's guile and grudgingly acknowledges his son's marriage.

In a startling and different role,

reinforcing his versatility as an actor, David Renton, who played the psychiatrist in **Equus**, is here seen as Geronte, another exaggerated father-figure, whose son (Charles Fletcher) has fallen in love with a gypsy girl. The son, Leander, bears the brunt of numerous puns in this scene, such as "don't meander, Leander," and "less candour, Leander". Renton, warbling and physically amusing in his costume, gait and activities, also falls under the spell of Scapin's cunning and fearfully submits to being enclosed in a canvas bag to protect him from fictitious assassins. This provides Scapin with perhaps the funniest and liveliest scene in the play, as he plays both avenger and victim, gleefully swatting his despicable master with a broom, as Geronte continues to cower in the bag. Greenblatt's Scapin shifts easily from one perspective to another here with self-satisfaction and gleaming egoism.

In the expectant happy conclusion, where all the twists of plot are proven satisfactory to all parties, the force and delight of Wood's adaptation can be seen most clearly. Sylvester's James Cagney impersonation helps to deliver Octavio from the angry hands of his father, and Scapin's frog-like tongue has grasped all conceivable and inconceivable falsehoods and exaggerations to fatten both his reputation and his wallet. The two marriages, Octavio's to Hyacintha, and Leander's to Zerbina, played with coyness and sexual warmth by Janet Doherty, are pleasing to both fathers, and the final fiesta is concluded, with another of Wood's adaptations, by Greenblatt's Scapin, who announces with candour that "when love's path is smooth, life's dull as hell".

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Book review

The Devil's Music

The Devil's Music: The History of the Blues
by Giles Oakley, British Broadcasting Corporation, 287 p.p., \$7.95
Reviewed by H. MacKinnon

Alex Haley would like this book. You will too if you are interested in music from a historical perspective.

Devil's Music is a history of the blues, and of necessity it is also a history of black Americans. As Giles Oakley points out in the introduction, "The lives of all black people in America have all been fundamentally shaped by the racial experience of slavery...Since the end of slavery the black communities have been searching for their identity - in relation to white culture, in relation to themselves, in relation to their past." The blues

have emerged from the roots of slavery, perhaps even being designed by them.

Since the understanding of social history is essential to developing a proper understanding of the blues, or any musical style, Oakley begins the book by tracing the cultural and artistic forms which existed during the period of slavery: the spirituals, the plantation songs, work songs, banjo music, fiddle tunes and dance.

Oakley's progression to the blues of today is handled with style, perception, and not a little compassion. He understands and 'feels' blues. Describing each blues idiom allows him to profile 'the greats': Charley Patton, Lead Belly, Bessy Smith, as well as the more contemporary artists, such as Muddy Waters and B.B. King.

Many personal stories about the big names in black music are provided by their contemporaries, many of these being in the form of radio documentary converted to book form. 'The History of the Blues' was aired on the BBC late last year and it is worth mentioning that only a few requests from the public could motivate CBC man-

agement to air the series.

The **Devil's Music** shows careful and detailed research - it is one of the best pieces of musicology I have seen. It is complemented by lyrics from over two hundred blues classics, such as "Welfare Blues":

"Now the gov'ment took it in charge
Said they're gonna treat ev'body right.
Give you some peas, beans, n'meal,
And then four or five cans of tripe."

(p. 169)

Sung by Speckled Red, the Albino barrelhouse pianist in 1938, this song evinces the particular empathic qualities of character of its performer. Red was communicating his feeling of despair (and perhaps acute perception) in the words of the song. Most of the lyrics Oakley includes in the book reveal the life and therefore the thoughts and emotions of their respective authors (anonymous and known). These expressions in lyric and melody are the sweet and bitter products of the imaginative music known as the Blues.

The **Devil's Music** in overall design is most attractive and effectively presented. The book is a treat for blues aficionados as well as an excellent introductory text for anyone who is tempted to like 'the devil's music'.

★ GRADUATE STUDENTS ★

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on Friday

March

March

March!