

Entertainment

Brecht's "Arturo Ui"

Vanier production is subtle study of Nazism

By BOB POMERANTZ

"If only we act instead of talking, we wouldn't always end up in our arse"
Brecht

On being seated in Vanier Dining Hall last Thursday night for the opening performance of the Resistable Rise of Arturo Ui, I didn't know what was brewing backstage. Past me filed a collection of characters reminiscent both of Guys and Dolls and Hitler's Last Days. I sat back for Fifteen minutes and proceeded to watch a girl, decked out in a Batman cape gape at the audience and silently toast them with numerous empty glasses of shnapps. Such an attempt at 'audience warming' is certainly not sufficient to engage impatient viewers for a quarter hour. To my surprise, however, the 'fraulein' came alive as the plays' prologue and vigorously proceeded to outline the plot and introduce the players, who trotted on and off the stage in fine football fashion. The play's opening seemed to foreshadow the pattern of the production - The action began monotonously, but by the second act, the performers gained energy, found the play's focus and proceeded to provide an entertaining and thought-provoking evening.

Brecht's play tells the story of a small-time mobster rising to power in gangland Chicago, which was in essence, a satire on Hitler's rise to ruthlessness and a biting criticism of humanity. The play was adequately executed by Fred Thury and ensemble, the cast having been made up of one or two 'professionals' but primarily filled by 'first timers'. There were a number of exceptions, however, who rose above the 'adequate' level. Jim Brown playing Ui, himself a 'first timer', was quite convincing. His gait and facial

expressions, capturing the heart of his Ui, were most proficient. While at times he seemed to be emulating 'The Fonz', on the whole he stayed in character.

Howie Shankman as Givola, (the limp) and Lloyd Gill as Roma were, both sinister and humorous, providing for an atmosphere which could be best described as nervously funny. Linda Stevens performance as the 'coquette', though stereotypic, was enjoyable just the same. Also, Shawna Rochberg's solo was note worthy.

I refrain from grouping Paul Sutton's portrayal of Dogsorough with the other ones since he is a professional actor. Nevertheless, his acting out of Dogsorough's physical and emotional decline was most engaging, his shakey movements and nervous exclamations being brilliantly portrayed. Though Sutton's excellence was evident, it is pleasing to note that he did not stand out conspicuously amongst the cast. This is a sign, both of enthusiastic performances by the unprofessional troupe and an illustration of tight direction on the part of Thury.

Two scenes in the production were especially memorable. In opening the City Hall sequence, before the action began the players were frozen to form a tableau. This was meticulously arranged and was wholly professional in appearance. Although such successful staging is a sign of strong direction, it also showed how the



Pat Chester and friends preparing the stage last week in the Vanier Dining Hall.

concentration level of the players rose significantly.

The trail scene was a joy to witness. Machine-gun interrogations by the advocates, neat black-outs and blaring jurors were all of a high calibre. Perhaps if Thury had slowed the scene down just a trifle it might have lost its slight feeling of slapstick (a la Marx Brothers) to become more meaningful.

The slides and film clips, accompanied by Ken Harland's crisp

drum solos added a documentary dimension to the production which only acted to enhance it. Though the projections were a little shakey initially, they became proficient as the entire production gathered up gusto.

The two-level stage was plain but utilitarian, adhering to the Brechtian tradition. However, the blue and grey paper covering the set was uncalled for. The set would better have served the play had the designer ignored using colour and

left the wood au naturelle.

The murder scenes, like Ui promised were not superfluous but "done for emphasis, not violence" It was refreshing to see people expire, unaccompanied by a myriad of gasps and thrusts.

On the whole, the play, like good shnapps, improved with time and left the audience in high spirits. Luckily, the cast was successful in avoiding "ending up on their arse", providing the audience with a vibrant product.

York student play is their best yet

By MICHAEL CHRIST

A man dreams, and if that man is Shakespeare the dream becomes poetry. The poetry can summon in

fantastic images, images of Bottom the Weaver translated into an ass. Yet, when the imagined is transformed into stage illusion it is an asses head we see and nothing more. The suggestivity and unmanageability of poetry suddenly is given limits.

The York Theatre Departments production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* has set out to explore those limits. It strives to enlarge upon the conventions and to enter into new territories of stage magic with the aid of modern theatre technology. The fairyland is illuminated with the spectral glows of an ultra-modern computer lighting system, the other worldly voices echo into infinity with the aid of solid state electronics, and the passage of the woodland spirits is concretized with the use of slides of fiberglass and plastic which intrude into the forest underworld.

Magic, in director Neil Dainard's production, is heavily literal: magic if it is to be believed must be expressed in a physically tangible form. We are not allowed simple faith in our imaginations, it

is an agnostic vision that seeks after enchantment but cannot find the innocence of naive belief. Instead it turns to technology to fill in the inadequacies of our spiritually corrupt existence.

The play is infused with a modern cynicism, it can believe in spirits no more than it can believe in Platonic love. The lovers are motivated by physical love, Helena and Hermia are no innocent maidens, they are inviting to the touch and they gladly suffer the presence of inquisitive hands. Oberon clutches at his crotch as he anticipates his fairy queen "enamoured of an ass". Titania herself is a buxom nymph in skin-tight leotards, her neckline plunging to her waist she foregoes the conventions of romantic love and twists the startled Bottom around her with a wantonness that is maintained for the entirety of their bewitchment. Eros is manifest in its rawest state, there is no distinction made between a 'maid's desire for a husband or a fairy queen's craving for the phallic ass. Lust is at least demonstrable,

Mr. Dainard finds it more tangible than the uncertain manifestations of love.

Whether one likes the explicit nature of the play, whether one sometimes shudders at the intrusion of special effects into the domain of poetry, is in many ways determined by one's attitude to the legitimacy of technology and its right to invade the domain of our dreams and creative imagination. This interpretation of Shakespeare is a legitimate attempt to understand the role theatre is to play in a changing world, whether the theatre is to hold on to the old masterpieces and become a craft or whether it is to remain a vital art, an emerging force in our attitudes to life.

Shakespeare himself had strong feelings on dramatic attempts to actualize the fantastic and imaginary. He would probably regard our mistrust of poetry with the same light he satirized Quince's play and the personations of Wall and Moonshine.

It is unfair to credit any one particular actor and impossible to mention all. The play is double-cast, and as each actor and actress plays in an alternate role, or with an alternate partner, in subsequent evenings it would require two separate reviews to do the cast due service.

The performers in the major roles of the play are the graduating class who will step out into the uncertainties of the professional theatre world this May. It is fitting that *Midsummer Night's Dream* is their best performance to date on the stages of York. Readers are encouraged to beg, borrow or steal a ticket to catch the play's last two nightly performances or the Saturday matinee. Admission is free.



Disco it ain't: Special guests David Darling (cello), Ketheryn Meses (flute), and Bernie Pilch (sax) highlight a concert of African drumming and ragtime improvisations by the NEXUS Percussion Ensemble. It takes place at Massey on Sunday after reading week, and tickets are \$1.50.

Pass the pretzels: Steve Forcht will be featured at the Orange Snail in Stong on Friday and Saturday.

Just take Route 66: Jean Anovilh's "Becket" starts tonight at the Playhouse 66 in Scarborough for the next 3 weeks. For further info call 751-3659.

Up yer tweeter: "The Meaning and structure of Bird Songs," a lecture by Dr. Bruce Falls of the University of Toronto's Zoology Department, is being held in the Royal Ontario Museum's Theatre at 8 pm tonight. Admission is free.

It's 99% pure: A sensational new rock musical comedy, "White Noise" is appearing at the Bathurst Street Theatre Tuesdays through Sundays. Tickets are priced from \$4-6. For further information call the Box Office at 534-4990.

**Excalibur contest
continues
next issue**



A dress rehearsal from Shakespeare's "A Midsummer's Night's Dream" which will appear in Burton until Sunday.