

you're a good man



charlie brown



W. N. Callaghan, Jr.

The Citadel's present production of **YOU'RE A GOOD MAN CHARLIE BROWN**, is a good solid mediocre production of what is basically a good solid mediocre musical. Certainly, Clark Gesner who was responsible for (one is almost tempted to say 'guilty of') the book, music, and lyrics for **CHARLIE BROWN** has not gone out of his way to enhance the material of the beloved Charles M. Schultz's comic strip. Thematically, the musical is little more than a random re-enactment of some of the more familiar episodes of 'Peanuts'. With the exception of one truly hilarious scene in which Gesner depicts, with operatic magnificence, the heroic attempts of the Peanut characters to write a book report on 'Peter Rabbit' the lyrics are clumsy and the music is stale. Considering the possibilities for insight and humour presented by Schultz's material, Gesner has done a singularly bad job in adopting the 'Peanuts' strip for the stage. In Peanutesque, 'You're a Good Man Charlie Brown' as a musical is a 'wishy-washy' effort. Charlie Brown himself could not have improved on its mediocrity.

Despite his efforts, however, Gesner is not able to entirely subvert the humour of the original 'Peanuts'. Although many of the scene fall flat on their round little faces many more succeed in evoking

sometimes a chuckle, sometimes a guffaw from the audience. In particular, Patty's sudden disillusionment while skipping rope and Snoopy's celebration of supertime manage to capture at least some of the soft humour that has become Schultz's trademark. Surprisingly enough, Snoopy's classic red baron scene is singularly ineffective—evoking laughter more because of the audience's expectations than because of its humour. This failure, perhaps more than any other, demonstrates Gesner's total inability to capture the spirit of Schultz's characters.

With one notable exception, the actors themselves demonstrate the same inability. The key to Schultz's deserved success is that he fully understands the medium with which he is working. Schultz's understated humour is ideally suited to the flat, two dimensional medium of the comic strip. His characters themselves are two dimensional both in terms of space and personality. Lucy, for example, although she may at times go through the emotions of self-recognition, never really gains true insight into who and what she really is. Even Charlie Brown's pessimism is two-dimensional, in that he never is able to define himself with the certainty that accompanies self-recognition. The 'Peanuts' characters on the

page are, in other words, two dimensional objects, totally lacking in the capacity for self-recognition.

The medium of the theatre consists of three dimension. In terms of character, the third dimension consists of either self-revelation or self-recognition. It is the distance between the appearance of illusion and the essence of reality which distinguishes the theatre from any other medium. This distance is established either by self-revelation, where, for example, Black Bart or his archetype, Iago, are ultimately brought to justice or by self-recognition, where for example, Nora in Ibsen's 'The Doll's House' finally realizes who and what she in fact is.

A play in which the distance between illusion and reality is established is a good play. One in which this distance is defined

is a great play. In this sense then, the function of the theatre, as defined by its medium, is to explore and discover reality. More than any other medium it is the vehicle for truth.

The actors in 'You're a Good Man Charlie Brown' have, again with one exception, extrapolated their characters directly out of Schultz's comic strip. The resulting two dimensional performances can be categorized in terms of blahdom: Fay Cohen as Lucy is

voiciferously blah; Marylou Moyer as Patty is delightfully blah; Grant Cowan as Snoopy is professionally blah; Graham McPherson as Charlie Brown, appropriately enough, is just plain blah. Only Jackson Davies as Linus manages to recapture the original spirit of the comic strip by creating the third dimension essential to good theatre.

Unlike the other characters, Davies' Linus has at least two levels. The first is the Linus involved in the action of the musical itself. On this level he goes through the by now familiar routines involving his passionate dependency on his blanket. Other than one truly hilarious number, 'Me and My Blanket', this Linus would, without more, sink into the two dimensional blahdom characteristic of his playmates. Davies, however, has managed to create a second level, a level of underlying reality.

Perhaps Davies has been given an unfair advantage over the other characters in the musical. For the only moment of recognition contained in the book of the musical itself arises when Linus realizes that someday he will have to give up his beloved blanket. Here the distance between the fiction of childhood and the ultimate reality of adulthood is suddenly revealed. Davies, as an actor, has the intelligence to seize on this single kernel of truth and to

nurture it throughout the remainder of the musical.

Although a participant in the shenanigans of the musical, Linus as Davies portrays him, is surprisingly objective in his perception of the events around him. As well as being a member of the cast participating in the fiction of the musical, Linus is a member of the audience critically aware of the realities underlying the illusion. Davies' ability to portray this double perspective, lends to the character of Linus a kind of subtle slyness. As well as performing for the audience, Davies confides in it. His habitual expression is that of a kind puckish leer directed to those (the audience) who like himself do not accept the absurdity of what is going on at face value. It is this ability to suggest the reality underlying the illusion which lends to his performance the depth essential to good theatre.

In summary, 'You're a Good Man Charlie Brown' is a somewhat disappointing musical, bland, commercial, a plastic facsimile of the original 'Peanuts' comic strip. It is, in other words, ideal theatre fare for the Christmas season.

The curtain times for the production are 8:30 p.m. Tuesday to Saturday, 7:30 p.m. Sundays and 2:30 p.m. matinees, Saturday and Sunday. For tickets, phone: 424-2828.

## hot cottage and more

I managed to make it up to the Room at the Top last Sunday night to hear Hot Cottage performing the last part of their first set. Immediately I noticed the changes that had taken place within the group. Obviously what stood before was a new lead guitarist Neil MacMahon; who with his style of guitar-playing was probably causing the greatest change in the group's sound.

Their material is now interspersed with a few more rock numbers accompanying their, now infamous, boogie and blues repertoire. They have even managed to add some 'frenzied rock in the style of Baroque'. It is a little hard to take if you have grown to expect the 'blat-loud licks' that Bodington laid down when he was with the group.

The group is going through a lot of changes which, like most changes, is causing a period of reassessment and upheaval. Hot Cottage seems to be handling it well and it certainly is good to hear the new things they are capable of doing.

Albany Studio 2 will be having Paul Hann December 8-9 and Joe Hall and the Eyeball Wine Company, Sunday December 10. Hann will perform at Room at the Top and Joe Hall at the Old Barricade. Both gigs are at 9:00 P.M. See you there! J. Shearn

Tuesday night a group of local folk musicians got together at RATT and presented a workshop on the life and music of the great American balladeer, Woody Guthrie.

It started out with Christ Mitchell giving a talk on Woodie Guthrie's early life, which was filled with sickness, disasters, and just plain hard times; yet basically Woody was still an optimist. A recording of Woody talking about how he first started playing the guitar, followed with his singing "Greenback Dollars" was the only "non-live" part of the program.

Most of the workshop consisted of everyone singing Woodie Guthrie songs, such as This Land is Your Land, Roll on Columbia, and even a bunch of Woody's children songs—all of which invited audience participation—and got it.

Probably the best workshop that the Edmonton Folk Club has presented this year, it successfully combined education and fun.

Other workshops scheduled for the new year are one on French Canadian Folk music, old time religion, blues, and probably a few on different ethnic groups. Anyone interested in helping out with these is asked to call Larry at 488-5565. ws

## alice in wonderland visits theatre three

For its Christmas presentation, THEATRE 3 is offering a new adaptation of ALICE IN WONDERLAND, and one of the special features of the production will be the inclusion of several numbers specially created for the show by the Alberta Contemporary Dance Theatre. In addition, the show itself is being choreographed by Jacqueline Ogg and Charlene Tarver, co artistic directors of the Alberta Contemporary Dance Theatre.

Another unique feature of the Christmas presentation will be the extensive use of puppets and marionettes. Whenever ALICE is larger or smaller than normal, either she or the other characters will be represented by a series of puppets created specially for the theatre by local puppet maker, Don Mills.

The puppets, about a dozen in number, will be hand-held, and will have simple mask-like faces

and costumes matching those of the actors. In addition, there will be one marionette used to represent the pigeon which mistakes ALICE for a serpent. The use of puppets is intended to facilitate the many changes in size which ALICE undergoes during her trip through Wonderland.

Don Mills, creator of the puppets, now works at the St. Albert Public Library and continues to work with puppets in his spare time.

The Christmas production will be especially appealing to children because of the use of puppets and dancers, as well as actors, to recreate the excitement and fantasy of this well-known children's classic.

ALICE IN WONDERLAND will run from December 13th to the 31st, with a special week of family matinees from boxing day to New Years.

## art gallery

(December 10, 2 p.m.)

The whole family is invited to design and print their own Christmas cards and wrapping paper at a special workshop at the Gallery. Last year more than 200 children and parents took part, so come early. Members of the staff will assist.

Please bring your own printing materials such as carrots, potatoes, cabbage and string.

An exhibition of recent water colours and sculpture by Edmonton artist Robert Sinclair will be on display at the Edmonton Art Gallery.