

Unseen presence moves 'The Empire Builders'

by Bob Walter

What moves people — literally and figuratively? The answer is some kind of force, whether physical or mental. A car drives a person to another place, an emotion to another state. "The Empire Builders" is about a family being chased ever upwards in an apartment building by a force, which appears as a bloody, mummified silent being, and a frightening series of unrecognizable noises. As the family ascends, the size of their living quarters diminishes, as do their possessions and the family unit itself, until the father is left alone in a single attic room.

The parents of the family

(father, mother, their 15-year-old daughter, and a sullen maid) refuse to accept the fact that they are running away from something. Their daughter sees the situation more clearly than they do, for she sees the end result, knowing they can't move upstairs forever. She prophesies a final confrontation, but unfortunately a prophet is never acknowledged in his own country, and the family keeps on climbing.

The maid lets the family decide her course for awhile, being under contract to them, but finally rejects the parents' non-attitude toward the situation. She goes downstairs,

facing the force and drops her fugitive role.

The daughter cannot take similar action because of family ties, though she tries to reason with her parents. The mother and father work as a unit, trying to keep each other convinced there is nothing wrong, trying unsuccessfully to forget the whole thing. The father is usually the leader in this self-deception, and is the last character forced into a confrontation with the pursuing danger.

That which drives the family from level to level is a combination of two things; the force itself and the family's reaction to it. They view it as something

malignant, therefore they are terrified by it. Force has no qualities of its own, only those assigned to it by others. Thus it is not the "nature of the force," it is how it is faced which determines survival or extinction.

In "The Empire Builders" this concept of force appears as the mysterious noises, whatever locks doors, whatever the parents are running from, and whoever the mysterious figure in white was.

This figure, the Schmutz, the surgeon's mistake, King Kong from the intensive care unit, although somewhat unclear as to function in the play, is a delight for the imagination.

Imagine a Christmas tableau. Take the tiny figure wrapped in swaddling bands, subject it to gamma rays until it is seven feet tall and has begun to decay. Slash it with a razor until the blood begins to ooze through the linen bands, and you have some idea of what the Schmutz looked like.

The scene changes between acts were adequate, but it is a pity that Pier One's facilities didn't allow for a single, three-leveled set unit, with the actors gradually working up to the top. Thus the play could have been a one act play, and the mood break between acts could have been avoided.

"Passion" impressive

by Tom Clahane

"Passion, the Events Touching The Life Of a Man Who Found God" played at the Rebecca Cohn this February 22, 23 and 24. Billed as a follow up to "Jesus Christ, Superstar" and "Godspell," the play was plotwise, predictable. Starting from this handicap, the author

David Farnsworth, had the difficult job of holding the attention of an audience who know the conclusion from the beginning.

Luckily for the audience, this play rarely loses their attention. "Passion" is an attempt to move freely through forms of

communication, utilizing music, spectacle, prose, and poetry as necessary to achieve a direct manner of address. The object is to project the distant onto the familiar, suggesting the continuing presence of Man's vision and suffering. The massacre of the innocents, the slaughter of the Jews, Vietnam; they all fall ultimately together. "This is the stated objective of the play and it did not fall short. The play moved smoothly from

one time to another, the jolts in time never destroying the continuity.

The acting was at all times adequate, and in isolated cases excelled. One such case was the long speech of the American advisor, Rob Hook, early in the play. Fine performances were also given by John Jefferson as Jesus, David Overton as Herod, and Jay Bowen as Pilate. One major contributor to the success of the production was the

excellent job of lighting done by Peter Guilford.

The only fault I held against the finished product was the first scene, second act, when Pilate's past was revealed. I felt this scene was unnecessary and detracted from a fine play. David Farnsworth's imagination and the acting of the cast breathed a little life into what is fast becoming a rather well explored area of entertainment.

Coming to Second Stage...

PILK'S MADHOUSE

PILK'S MADHOUSE, a zany series of skits by an Irish Canadian self-confessed madman — Henry Pilk — in collaboration with Ken Campbell, is being produced until March 18 at Second Stage, 1667 Argyle Street.

The show is a call to and a celebration of madness. It laughs while the society around it crumbles. The medium is definitely humour — a humour born of the Goon Show and Monty Python, and at times crazier than both.

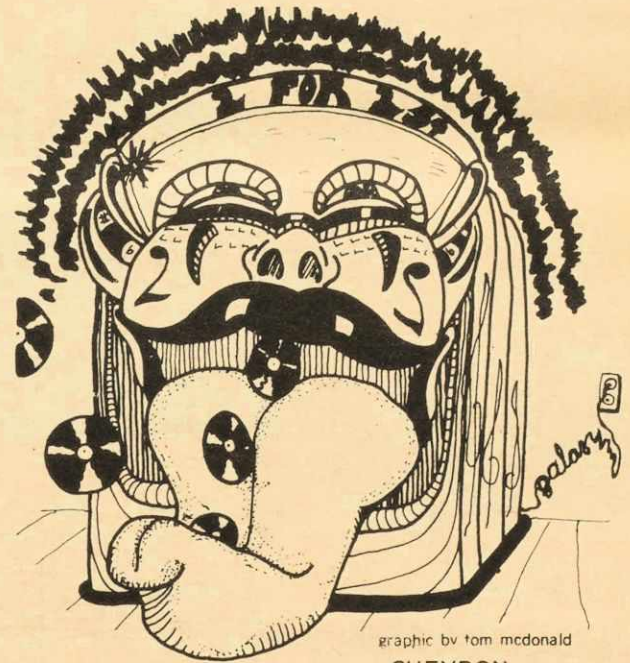
The cast of PILK'S MADHOUSE includes Patricia Ludwick and Blair Brown, both seen recently in Neptune productions, Richard Donat, Peter Elliot and Lionel Simmons. The show is being directed by Michael Mawson.

The author, Henry Pilk, is a Brendan Behan type character who writes like he drinks, continually until he passes out. Born in Cabbage Town and brought up in Ireland and Newfoundland, he met Ken Campbell in Ireland after

getting out of the Grange Gorman Asylum for the second time and spent time with his (Campbell's) Travelling Freak Show, when they put together this collection of Pilk's scribbles.

Playlets such as: Total Tango Time, Chicken, Baseball Nymph, and I'm The Same Me, to name just a few, will make for a very funny, very alarming evening. The cast of characters includes the Fantastic Chicken Boy, the Amazing Diminishing Men and the Man Who Disappeared Up His Own Arsehole.

There are performances every day except Monday at 8:30 p.m. and Saturday matinees at 4:30 p.m. Student prices are \$1.25.



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