

Mummer is really sort of a thrill



by Chris Morash

I sat in on the final dress rehearsal of Dal Theatre Productions' *Midsummer Night's Dream* a couple of evenings ago. At least, I think I did. Maybe I only dreamt it. I'm still wondering "What dream was here?"

To walk in off the street to the Dunn Theatre, where the show is running until Dec. 3, is to drift from blah December into the lushness of spring. The stage has been sodded with grass (the real stuff, not astroturf) and the whole theatre smells like a May afternoon; above this lawn hangs a massive net covered with shifting blue-green leaves, from which two incredibly long swings drop down to the level of the stage. And in the middle of this vast verdant expanse, the play begins with three figures dressed in white, looking a bit like escapees from a 1920s boat club.

If you think that sounds surreal, wait until you see the enchanted world of Titania and Oberon; suspended above the stage, the huge net opens out to a slope, undulating like some kind of living mountain, crawling with a colony of sensuous fairy nymphs, caressed by the haunting sounds of Sandy Moore's Irish harp.

This environment, created by scenographer Peter Perina, costume designer Robert Doyle and Roland Langlois, who wrote the original music, might threaten to overwhelm actors using a con-

ventional Shakespearian acting style. But conventional Shakespeare this is not; instead, director Roger Blay gives us physical Shakespeare.

Indeed, a Shakespearian purist might not wish to hear the play, for, with a few exceptions, Blay seems to be working against the natural rhythms of the language, looking instead for the raw vigour that lies beneath the words, concentrating on the actors' bodies, not their voices. This is particularly noticeable in the parts of the play that deal with the earthly lovers, Glenn White's Demetrius, Sherrie Ford's Helena, Scott Burke's Lysander, and Shanna Kelly's Hermia. However, it is a credit to these four performers that they are able to transform Shakespeare's courtly lovers into Blay's bizarrely stylized, libido-driven vision, for the most part making it work.

Just as the magical kingdom ruled by John Jay's Oberon and Jenette White's Titania is physically more elevated than its earthbound counterpart, so too is its language more poetic. White's sultry queen of the fairies and Jay's Oberon play their roles with a strong sense of their objectives, showing us that the trials and pleasures of love are much the same in their world as ours, however much the presence of a mischievous sprite like Christine Walker's Puck, looking like an androgynous Errol Flynn, might complicate matters.

Perhaps because the whole play treats love in such a physical way, it is in those sections that deal with the most naturally physical characters—Bottom and his randy mechanicals—that Blay's approach works best. Bottom, played masterfully by Andrew Cox, and his cronies Flute, Starveling, Snout, Snug and Mistress Quince, played by Scott Owen, Sheldon Davis, Stephen Tobias, Teresa Innis and Trinity Dempster respectively are, in a word, hilarious. I don't think I've laughed so hard since Monty Python went off the air as I did at their outrageously rude, show-stealing performance for the Duke.

While you're applauding at the end of this play, I think it might be a good idea to add a few extra claps for the technical crew, for I get the impression that while this show might look like a dream from the audience's point of view, it may be more like a nightmare backstage. After all, where else do they have to mow the stage?

All things considered, however, DTP's *Midsummer Night's Dream* is a show that defies indifference. You're either going to hate it, or you're going to love it. If your heart goes pitter-pat at the sound of Shakespearian poetry rolled trippingly off the tongue, you might walk away shaking your head. But if you enjoy imaginative, iconoclastic theatre, and raw, madcap energy, this show has got it.

Persians victims of bad press says Cook

J. M. Cook
The Persian Empire
J. M. Dent and Sons Ltd.
Toronto, 1983

by Eric Wilson

The great nineteenth century German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche believed the ancient Persians to be one of the great heroic peoples of history.

Despite Nietzsche, the Persians have traditionally suffered from "bad press" among both the historical and lay community.

This legacy has been primarily the result of the Greco-Persian wars (480-79 B.C.). Those wars involved a small number of Greek city-states which temporarily united to successfully resist the overwhelming military forces of the Persian empire. This feat is comparable to the Maritimes successfully defending Canada against a full-scale U.S. invasion.

Since the Greeks were the first people to develop the scientific and academic study of history, our view of the Persians has been prejudiced by the Greek interpretation of events.

Dalhousie professor J. M. Cook seeks to rectify the wrongs

of history in his new book, *The Persian Empire*.

Cook reminds us that Persian rule gave western Asia 200 years of peace.

Much of the book deals with the structure and function of the Persian imperial bureaucracy and its administrative difficulties in dealing with such a huge geographical empire.

Cook serves as an excellent guide through the accomplishments of Cyrus the Great and

Darius I, the administrative organization of the provinces and the assembling of Xerxes' disastrous military expedition to Greece.

Cook goes to great pains to explode the traditional charge of

"oriental despotism" levelled against the Persians.

Despite peripheral border wars with the Aegean peoples, Cook

writes "there is no evidence that the rest of the empire normally found Persian rule oppressive." Cook suggests that indeed the Persian empire was a definite plus to the development of west-

ern civilization.

He tempers his fondness for the empire's accomplishments by reminding us the Persians "were not a people that we should call intellectual. They do not themselves seem to have an inclination towards literature, medicine, or philosophical and scientific speculation." The cradle of western civilization still belongs in Greece, Cooke writes.

The greatest weakness in Cooke's work is the comparatively scant attention given to Zoroastrianism, the official religion of the empire. It proved to have decisive impact on the development of Judaism and early Christianity.

A greater emphasis on this aspect of Persian culture would have made *The Persian Empire* more relevant to our understanding of western civilization, since the struggle between good and evil lies at the very heart of western theological thought and current international politics.

The Persian Empire is an excellent introductory work. It appears Nietzsche was right about the Persians after all.

Something swinging in London

There's something swinging in London town; assorted hipsters and flipsters are walking the jive dive steps and freezing to the big sound. A bunch of guys called **Roman Holiday** are blasting the serious swing back from the past with the smack that puts the snap back into crocodile. Don't stand by, lend a lobe and flip your wig.

Grooves like *Don't Try to Stop It*, *Serious Situation* and *I.O.U.* speak the truth on the 80's pop aesthetic. It's the big bad sounds of the rest of the album that cut loose with the force of the Bowery Boys on jittering overload: Lights out. Don't take the bus; accept no substitutes.

These boys are sailors on leave, they mean to jive with serious revenge for years of pop self-indulgence by an industry that has replaced fun with philosophy. Do I sound like a true believer? I mean it. Standby by 'Round and 'Round, *One More Jilt*, *Beat My Time*, *No Ball Games*, *Furs and High Heels*, and *Motoemaniac* lay it all on the line with horn lines that make your hair stand at attention. This is serious stuff. This music will make your most well dressed uninvited guest turn tail and vamoose.

The coolest cut, the cruelest scratch is *Jive Dive*. It's a slow dirty ditty and it really does make

side step Joey look such a fool. You see, he does the jitterbug to daddy cool. Unheard of! The horns are as black as coal there and the boogie man knows how to blow. Seriously folks. Fred Flintstone said it all: "I'm hip, I'm hip." Yabbbadabbadoo.

If you want to catch the sound and feel the beat tune into CKDU, those crazy kids on campus ready to bebop at the drop of a needle, next Monday at 8 in the evening to catch **Hot Off the Presses**. The album is *Cookin' on the Roof*, the band is a batch of hipsters called *Roman Holiday* and the sound is big!

FOR CKDU BY DADDY-O