

Slapstick treatment of politics in *Beguine*

Backyard Beguine
Workshop West Theatre Co.
Kaasa Theatre
Run ends March 22

review by Denise Kenney

Backyard Beguine... where does one begin? Even the title is rather inaccessible. *Beguine* could mean either a popular dance of Saint Lucia and Martinique or a lay Roman Catholic sisterhood not bound by irrevocable vows! The play itself, like the title, is also confusing. The play's subject suggests a polit-

ical satire; but as a political satire, it doesn't make the grade. The play does create laughter, but it doesn't use this laughter as a weapon to evoke other responses such as indignation or rage. In fact, most of the humour is slapstick or character based, and not a moment is lost that has the potential for some yuks, even when the humour is inappropriate.

At first the play seems to use comedy at the expense of a very tragic issue, but the ending hints that sincere concern may have been

the catalyst for the play's creation. Whatever the play is, or is meant to be, it deals with a situation especially relevant to Canada these days: North American involvement in Central American politics. Rarely do mainstage productions deal with events so immediately important. The big disappointment is that even though the setting for the play is relevant, the play does not move the audience at all. It is flat, and too complacently clever to properly deal with the issues which provide the occasion for the piece to be written.

The play begins in George's backyard, somewhere in the United States. Here we meet George, the representative American (possibly Reagan), who struggles to maintain "continuity and the American way of life." He finally resorts to using a gun to ensure this security, and is persuaded by a neighbour to look into hiring some "grateful" fellows from the poor fictional country of Quatajorgo to protect these interests. We also learn in this scene that the carnation George's slightly more liberal son Guy is wearing is from Quatajorgo — a place where people grow carnations for export instead of crops for food.

The action then moves to the jungle of Quatajorgo, where we see Guigarte (the president of the country), Mr. Secretary (Guigarte's personal secretary), and Magyato (Guigarte's childhood friend and assistant). The scene opens with the three singing while driving a ridiculous jeep around the stage. This funny threesome meet up with Suzanna, daughter of the leftist rebel leader. After an encounter with the Ultras, the right wing faction which is at war with the rebels, Guigarte establishes a cease fire by ensuring the safety of the rebel leader's daughter.

It is at this point that Suzanna and Magyato fall in love and have a lovely picnic of chicken and coke outside of Suzanna's "shack." The second act becomes progressively more serious as we see Guigarte at his presidential palace try to maintain power in his country by keeping the Rebels, Ultras, CIA, and starving masses under control. The

American presence is represented by an often used bright red phone, a White House birdhouse (upon which a proud stuffed eagle is perched), and an important looking desk. All of these are also found in George's backyard, which is identical to the presidential grounds.

In the end, comedy takes a back seat to drama, and the play takes an unexpected turn. Unfortunately, by this time it is too late to grapple with the issues seriously, and the audience is forced to try to tie together the whole clever scenario.

While all this may seem undoubtedly political, the comedy within this scenario has little to do with politics.

In the first act, slapstick laughs are only occasionally interrupted with one-liners such as: "He is a folk hero because he was killed by the police," or "...in a country where democratic freedom is beside the point." The acting, like the set, is cartoon-like, and much of the comedy is derived from the extremely colourful characters. When these cardboard cut-out characters mention politics, they step outside the bounds of realism for their characters.

In the second act, the political satire gains strength and invades the essentially "yuk yuk" atmosphere with whole scenes. One of these scenes shows Guigarte and Magyato ridiculously simulating CIA torture methods over the phone to reassure Americans that all is under control. Even this brave satire gives way to serious drama by the end in an attempt to "be meaningful," as a beautiful legend is told of the sky showing its power by raining upon the earth, whereby the rivers, angry under the burden, flood the land. This metaphor for the hierarchy of power very simply pinpoints what the production tries to show, but doesn't.

The play is good for laughs. It surprises me, though, that with such experienced people involved in the production more questions were not asked during the play's development as to just what the play was meant to evoke besides snickers.

Mike's Music Trivia

by Mike Spindloe

Well, by the time you read this there will be a mere three weeks of classes to go. I hope you're all as far behind as I am (who wants to suffer along, right?). In keeping with the general feeling of ennui that pervades this Sunday afternoon as I write, this week's topic is dead rock stars. That may sound a little morbid, but what the heck, there must be some good jokes in there somewhere. All you have to do is give the year in which they died and how they died.

Last week's winner is Lisa Jane Watson, in B.Ed. IV, who was among several people who scored a perfect ten out of ten. Lisa wins a gift certificate from Auracle, 10808 Whyte Avenue, that fine establishment where you can always find the genial proprietor, Hal Christianson, behind the counter (or under it) and ready to share his vast store of musical knowledge.

Here are this week's questions.

For the following people, name the year in which they died and how they met their untimely demises:

- 1) Buddy Holly
- 2) Janis Joplin
- 3) Sid Vicious
- 4) Jimi Hendrix
- 5) Keith Moon
- 6) Ronnié Van Zant (Lynyrd Skynyrd)
- 7) Marvin Gaye
- 8) Jim Morrison
- 9) John Bonham
- 10) Sam Cooke

Bonus question (for all you easy listening fans): Karen Carpenter

ANSWERS TO LAST WEEK'S (#6) QUIZ:

- 1) Julian Lennon has released two albums to date.
- 2) Denny Laine was a member of the Moody Blues, and in fact penned their early hit, "Go Now," which appears on Wings' "Over America" LP.
- 3) Pete Best was the Beatles' original drummer.
- 4) Cynthia Powell was John Lennon's first wife.
- 5) John and Yoko held their bed-in in Montreal at the Queen Elizabeth Hotel.
- 6) John Lennon's last public stage appearance was at a concert by Elton John in New York City. A German-issue EP survives as a memento of the occasion.
- 7) Paul McCartney has been by far the most successful of the ex-Beatles as a solo artist.
- 8) "My Sweet Lord," allegedly plagiarized from "He's So Fine," by the Chiffons.
- 9) "Yesterday" and "Love Me Do" (UK) and "Twist and Shout" and "Got To Get You Into My Life" (all over) made the charts for the Beatles after their breakup. There was also an atrocity called the "Beatles Movie Medley" that was a minor hit.
- 10) Ringo Starr has appeared in several movies, including "Caveman," "Frank Zappa's 200 Motels," "Candy," "The Magic Christian," and "Water."

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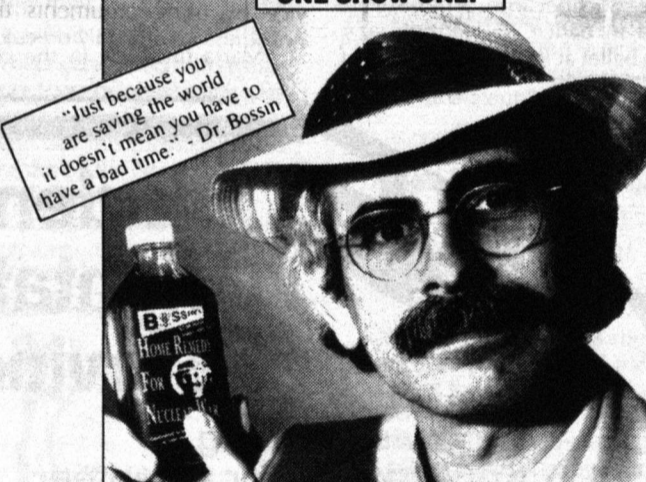
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