



Many happy returns (we hope)

The Alberta Contemporary Theatre had an open house celebration last weekend in SUB theatre. It was five years old.

Like any five year old, the theatre invents its own challenges then develops the technique to master them. All choreography is generated from within, either by artistic directors Jacqueline Ogg and Charlene Tarver, or in collaboration with guest choreographers; contributing to the weekend program were Wallace Seibert (Department of Drama, U of A) and Iris Garland (Dept. of Kinesiology, Simon Fraser University).

For their fifth anniversary, the Theatre premiered five dances, performed by Bonnie Reese, Maureen Herman, Lottie Krohn, Sherrie Waggner, Robert Fleming and Ronald Johnson.

23 SKIDOO (Iris Garland) and *MOODS II* (Wallace Seibert) began and ended the program in a glib tone. *23 SKIDOO* provided the dance styles of the 1920's, a common theme, but done refreshingly well. The company wisely controlled their imitation, since dances like the Charleston parody themselves with only a little extra wobble. Their bemusement provided the real satire, not of the dances, but the era. The exit was particularly astute, as the company shuffled off draped together in a marathon dance number, as though the excess energy of the twenties shuffled with them. *MOODS II* was a medley of jazz tunes featuring much shaking of wares, high kicking and again, a tone of we-don't-know-better-now (or do we?) attended the evening with wit and a feeling of satisfaction.

In between, the Theatre presented three dances that demanded more interpretive attention from the audience. From *The Major Arcana* (Jacqueline Ogg) presented an

astrological trilogy - *The Magician, The Star and The Lovers*. In *The Lovers*, Bonnie Biese and Robert Fleming entwined and were entwined, by a snake-green scarf to render the most exquisite moments of the Saturday evening performance. *Spiral Vortex* (Jacqueline Ogg) suffered during a fit of temper from SUB's sound system, but managed to evoke images of journey and expansion-contraction. In *Islands of Infinity* (Charlene Tarver), three shapes, sculptured by Pat Glabraith, were made worlds by the dancers, the lighting, and the vast airy mood set by the music of Paul Horn. In the void of infinity, the worlds were alternately wrestled in herculean fashion, and enjoyed in dance for the merits of their form and attitude. Interplay of direction and improvisation was evident and important in each of these three dances.

Costuming by Wendy Albrecht, and technical direction by Colin Reese, was discreet except when it wasn't, and then it wasn't supposed to be.

After Saturday's performance, artistic director Charlene Tarver remarked that the Theatre is becoming firmly established as an artistic school, and in the minds of Alberta public. One reward of this growing maturity is that some dancers who began here then went afield to explore other theatres are returning to augment the Alberta Theatre with their travelled wisdom.

Dance is now in high demand in Edmonton: witness the appearance of seven major tours since September, and Mrs. Tarver feels the local Alberta Theatre will be further recognized as their reputation spreads. The Theatre has done some spreading of its own through tours of small-town Alberta, fund-raising appearances at Edmonton

shopping centres, and television productions.

Next year's birthday should see this child grow and change once again; hopefully its spirit will never grow cautious with age.

Don Truckey

Gustafson - award winning poet, reads

Ralph Gustafson, winner of the 1975 Governor General's Award for Poetry, will give a public reading of his poetry on Friday, January 30 at 8:00 p.m. in the Humanities Bldg. Lecture Theatre One. Admission is free.

Ralph Gustafson has written over a dozen volumes of poetry; is an authority on music, an educator in the humanities, and a world traveller.

His influential anthologies of Canadian writing, notably the *Penguin Book of Canadian*

Sunshine Boys...

Snap, crackle, poop!

We are constantly told by those who should know that good drama always contains conflict. This is a view which I agree with. And so, apparently, does Neil Simon. In *Barefoot in the Park* we have conflict between newlyweds. In the *Odd Couple* we have the continued warfare between Oscar and Felix.

And now we are given *The Sunshine Boys*. Al Lewis and Willie Clark are two old and legendary Vaudevillians who have been separated for eleven years. As Willie says, "I haven't seen him in eleven years. I haven't spoken to him in twelve years." The reasons for their parting provide some of the comic moments in the play. After all this time Willie's nephew tries to bring them back together to do one of their famous skits for a television special. What happens in the course of this attempted reunion provides the action of the play.

It is another truism of the theatre that comedy is much harder to play than straight

drama. This became evident during the Citadel production of this Neil Simon comedy. Not only is it a comedy, it is also a comedy about comedians. The people portrayed are not ordinary but belong to a very small and exclusive club. Unfortunately, this is where the play fell down.

Firstly, it got off to a very slow start. It wasn't until halfway through the first scene that it got any significant response from the audience.

Having recently read the script, I found that the play's essential comedy was not effectively reproduced in the Citadel production. The play opens with Willie Clark (Guy Sanvido) sitting alone in his hotel room. He then gets up and fumbles around until his nephew comes. Instead of being funny, Sanvido merely played a cranky old man, much too seriously.

I felt the rest of the cast (Martin Fishman as his nephew and Michey Costello as Clark's partner Al Lewis) suffered somewhat from the same problem; lack of expertise in the comedic attitude. Lines which I thought read very well in the script just did not come off, which just goes to show that there is more to getting a laugh than saying a funny line.

This was unfortunate because Neil Simon comedies are very compact. One line follows another quickly; snap, snap snap. And this subject could give full rein to his genius.

It should be interesting to see what the movie does with it. It stars Walter Matthau, a Simon veteran; George Burns, a genuine vaudeville warrior, and Richard Benjamin. Hopefully they will do the play the full justice it deserves.

The Sunshine Boys runs January 17 through February 21 at the Citadel Theatre.

Steven J. Adams

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