

Entertainment

Exit Who? :a nice light snack

Exit Who?
Walterdale Theatre
til Jan. 18

by Virginia Gilles

One of the last lines in *Exit Who?*, playing at the Walterdale Theatre, is "that's the way the cookie crumbles." Well, this cookie (the play, that is) crumbles into place not too badly at all. A "whodunnit" with a comic twist, *Exit Who?* tells the story of a spy with a midnight rendez-vous at a rented house. He is in hot pursuit of a security threatening microdot (a computer component which is smaller than a microchip).

A farce is a unique acting challenge because it demands confidence, timing, and flexibility from performers. The entire cast of this production turned in overall solid performances though there were a few problems. David Parker, playing the senile Colonel Wilfred Wooster, didn't seem entirely comfortable opening the play, but other than that his character was bumblingly endearing and believable. Judy Unwin, in

the role of Crane Hammond the mystery novel writer, was a bit stiff and seemed uncomfortable in the first act, but she eventually overcame that and relaxed for the latter part of the show. Will Preville, as Joel Dover the C.I.A. agent, gave a solid performance, playing his Maxwell Smart type detective modestly and humorously. Though the voice he employed seemed a bit forced at times, it ultimately worked for his character. Francie Goodwin gave the best performance in her portrayal of Kate Bixley, Hammond's New York secretary. Flamboyant and saucy with a sharp wit, Goodwin's character pulls the cast together by bridging the gap between Hammond's "straight guy" role and the farcical and colourful characters played by Mark Milne, Linda Karenko, and Margaret Bles.

When actors take risks on the stage with their character development the credit is not theirs alone. Recognition must go to director Tom Dodd for his capable handling of the play, his ability to instill confidence in his performers, and his flexibility in doing so.

The freedom the actors displayed is what rounded out the humour and saved the play from becoming trite. The supporting performances by Robert Woodbury and Rowe Anne Rivet rather lacked presence but were acceptable and did not hurt the show.

The set is lovely. Its light, airy appearance, with its appropriate amount of "comfort" for a holiday house, and its finished look lend to the harmless, lighthearted humour and mystery of the play. Paul Schneider merits congratulations as it is rumoured that he is responsible for the authentic ring of the antique telephone. Bravo Paul!

There were moments in the performance when the players struggled. When speculating as to why these moments occurred, certain considerations have bearing. To begin with, this was a preview performance, given to a polite but not overly enthusiastic audience. The play and the actors were still working to come together as a whole and as a result were easily thrown off. Though there were a few moments of awkwardness on the stage, for the most part the production suc-



Photo Leif Stout

ceeded and offered an evening of enjoyable, light comedy.

Out of Africa:

Out of Africa
Universal
Westmount

review by John Charles

Out of Africa has gotten rave reviews for its epic African scenery, and has been called "a lip-smacking humdinger of a movie" by one enthusiastically quoted commentator. These seem curious reactions to an intimate movie which is about a woman who painfully learns to let go of things — including those she loves.

Maybe we've had such a surfeit of teenage and special-effects movies in 1985, that the reviewers are too numb to react to Pollack's surprising understatedness. A romantic movie which teams Redford and Streep can apparently be evaluated by their names on the marquee alone: we know what kind of movie it will be, and if seeing the film contradicts that, some people still stick with their preconception rather than the movie itself.

The movie is roughly based on Isak Dinesen's memoir *Out of Africa*. But some Dinesen

some aristocrats learn to let go

fans are unhappy with the movie, since it adds the now-known biographical facts of Dinesen's African years (1914-1931) to her coolly impersonal book.

Dinesen, who died in 1962, was one of Denmark's greatest modern writers, and nominated for the Nobel Prize several times. Her best works, *Seven Gothic Tales* (1934), *Winter's Tales* (1942), and *Out of Africa* (1937), find new and devoted readers every generation.

Dinesen, whose real name was Karen Blixen (Meryl Streep), is an unconventional, aristocratic woman, as is established in the movie's opening scene in Denmark, when she decides to marry her first cousin, Bror (Klaus Maria Brandauer) purely for convenience. He wants her money, and she wants a friendly companion with whom to go to East Africa (now Kenya) and start a dairy. It's a deal — a fair exchange — but we observe that she still expects to be loved by him. That's the first of her disappointments.

One of the film's great strengths is how much it conveys in very short scenes.

Bror has to make a decision about the farm's future one day since Karen is away. He decides it will become a coffee plantation, not a dairy farm — then goes off hunting for days. Bror is interested in living his own life not assisting Karen in her dreams.

One of the film's great strengths is how much it conveys in very short scenes. When Karen realizes Bror is off hunting again, she gets furious and starts packing. The camera shows her flinging things into her suitcase — then suddenly sitting down and relaxing. Then we cut to a scene in which she takes charge of the farm. But that single moment where she sits down and thinks is exquisitely placed.

Robert Redford plays Denys Finch Hatton, a big game hunter who was a "friend," in her book, and the great love of her life in fact, (as revealed in recent biographies of her by Judith Thurman, and of him by Errol Trzebinski). Though a hunter himself, he deplores the playboys' hunting parties that he escorts. And his awareness that the Africa of the 1920s is changing and will soon be extinct becomes a

further reason for loving it intensely. He teaches Karen to share this love and wonder, and their gradually growing love for each other is bound up in this sense of the transience of things — happiness, relationships, the pastoral civilization around them.

In an interview, Pollack said that the book's famous opening sentence — "I had a farm in Africa" — puzzled him and scriptwriter Kurt Luedtke. Their gradual conviction that Dinesen's work is about the impossibility of "having," or possessing things — farms, animals, husbands — has made that the movie's main theme.

Occasionally, specific lines about trust and the pointlessness of marriage vows sound like late-night dormitory philosophy, especially as spoken by Redford, who gives a charming, pleasant performance, but remains good old Redford every second.

His character's ability to always turn up whenever Karen has a crisis is silly, as is the script's tendency to make Karen into the perfect feminist heroine. But the movie goes

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