

New upstairs theatre holds 36 people

Passé Muraille experiments with Raincoat & Raincoat

By JOHN OUGHTON

Passé Muraille is, on the evidence of its two new plays, still the most experimental theatre company in Toronto. The new pieces, Me, You, Us and the Raincoat and Renegade in Retrospect, are departures from previous Passé Muraille productions in many ways. Me, You, Us and the Raincoat is staged in a newly opened upstairs theatre which seats all of 36 people. Renegade in Retrospect takes place in the much larger downstairs theatre and four of the five actors are middle-aged members of Actors' Equity.

The first piece is actually a series of sketches and media pieces with the common image of people in raincoats. The various Raincoat events are sufficiently unconnected and unexpected to produce mild shock in the minds of those expecting a play with a plot and 'meaningful' dialogue. A portly gentleman sitting just ahead of me in the audience informed me that I

should stop talking since the play was beginning. However, once it had unfolded for 10 minutes or so, the same gentleman commenced tapping his feet, making comments and conspicuously yawning; obviously Raincoat did not fulfill his definition of drama.

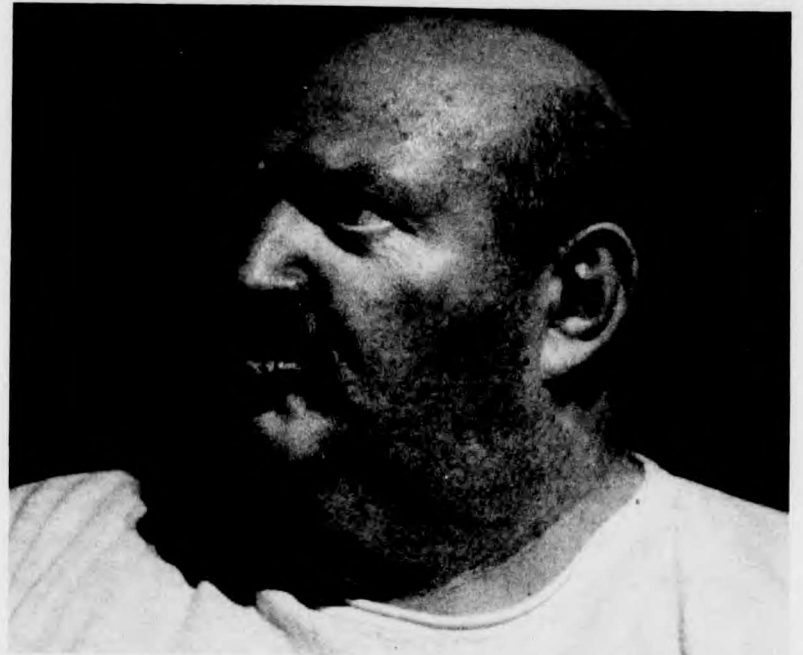
One of the nice things about Passé Muraille is that they exhibit a sense of humor on the part of the director and actors. The pieces that comprised Raincoat were right on the borderline between being self-consciously 'arty' experimental drama and being good put-ons which turned the audience's expectations back on themselves. An actor began the play by turning on a tv set in the room. Unfortunately, due to the crowded seating, I was unable to see what was on it, but apparently it involved a cut-up of election night in Ontario with people in raincoats appearing here and there. Next the actor switched on a radio, which played strange conversation about

raincoats and exhibitionists. The conclusion of all this is a beautiful joke which I won't tell in case you go to the plays.

The major part of Raincoat, involved a series of encounters "starring" (as the program says) Stuart Kent and Martha Gibson. They recite numbers to each other, mime to nicely garbled taped voices and appear and disappear behind an ingenious series of screens that slide back and forth.

Renegade in Retrospect is completely different. The set is composed of a bar with a tape recorder and glasses and a number of tavern-like small tables with three or four chairs apiece. The actors sit and occasionally address audience members seated at others and thus the atmosphere of a bar is maintained. Renegade utilizes the social convention of a tavern where people, by getting drunk, reveal things

The dialogue, written by Frank Parman, is extremely naturalistic.



Kingfish Rais in Renegade in Retrospect.

Shortcomings of Burton Auditorium place burden on Amedee production

By JULIE BAYLISS

Ionesco's plays were first being produced at a time when the English-speaking theatre was at last taking notice of a world beyond the personal problems of the upper middle class.

His surrealistic world was criticized for its superficiality in ignoring the problems of the social world. His reply was that his world is not surreal but that his contemporary playwright's concerned themselves with the surreal; that he dealt not with conditions that could be learned about in political speeches but with the pain of living that no society has been able to abolish.

Amedee is theatre of the absurd on two levels. First there is the circus absurdity of corpses that sing and people that fly. There is also the absurdity the human condition where we adapt to our problems instead of solving them, and shared anguish is all that binds us together. On the first level the play is a hilarious romp through the clichés of surrealism. However its meaning on the other level was stressed in this week's production at the Burton Auditorium by the Theatre de Poche-Montparnasse.

Ionesco gives immensely detailed directions for the staging of his plays, which demand a proscenium, wings, flies and other architectural aids to the suspension of disbelief which the Burton Auditorium does not offer. This production offered a stripped down approximation to the elaborate set and mechanical tricks of the text

which served to de-emphasize the farcical aspects of the piece. The tiresomely long intermission and the almost complete elision of the third act was dramatically harmful; the play should build up from dull normality to a climax of ridiculousness at the end. This may have been due to the physical shortcomings of the house, and it placed an immense burden on the almost unaided performances of Etienne Bierry and Renee Delmas.

M. Bierry made Amedee an amiable fellow who has learned to love his particular problem as an excuse for his own ineffectiveness. One of the silliest lines in theatre must be when he comforts the appallingly burdened Madeleine with "tout le monde a ses ennuis." Yet in the end he is justified. His premonition that even Madeleine might regret the solving of their dilemma is fully justified. Renee Delmas' reading of Madeleine dominates the whole evening and turns the play into an essay in anguish. Her shrewishness and occasional silliness never interfere with our sympathy for her predicament. To live for 15 years with Amedee's lassitude and the problem it has brought them, and then, when all she had hoped for was that her old age might be less tormented, to find that in getting rid of it she had lost everything. Without such a commanding performance the play would be trivial and pointless except as a surrealistic farce and it is a tribute to M. Ionesco's potential durability as a playwright that the Theatre de Poche should have chosen this emphasis.

CULTURAL BRIEFS

Lambeth's photo display pleasant

Michael Lambeth's excellent photographic display, "Encounter" (in College G) is not a pleasant experience. The photographs show a world of incongruities, awkward postures, distortions and imbalance. His exploration takes us into that beautiful, frightening world of the unreality of reality — one of the truths told best by photography above other media. Technically, the prints do not rise above usual NFB quality. Although most of the images fail as photographic entities, the display succeeds in the wealth of overtones surrounding the ideas. The collection is more than an "Encounter" both for Lambeth and ourselves. The photographs communicate at a universal level; although unpleasant, they could be important.

— Rick Lambert

Tibetan monks visit Stong

In conjunction with a show of Indo-Tibetan art now appearing at the Stong College Gallery, two Tibetan monks will be at the gallery from 1-7 pm on Saturday. Anyone who saw the show of Tibetan art at Stong last year and experienced the temple music played at it should make a point of attending.

Poet MacLeish to speak Saturday

Archibald MacLeish, the American poet and librarian, will be speaking at York Saturday after receiving his honorary degree. MacLeish is arguably most famous for his play J.B.

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