

Stratford - upon - Calgary

Calgary's Jubilee Auditorium looked strangely like the Strand Theatre at a Saturday matinee when Gateway staffers John Thompson and Terry Donnelly arrived there last weekend for a gala Stratford Festival Players presentation. (It looked even more like Edmonton's Jubilee Auditorium.)... Throngs of young Calgarians, outnumbered only by old Edmontonians, flocked to see

Twelfth Night in the afternoon, and on Saturday evening the curtain rose on Gogol's Government Inspector.

Messrs. Thompson (who was enthusiastic about both plays) and Donnelly (who was unimpressed) were pried away from each other's throats long enough to come to an agreement, and divided the task of criticism between themselves. Here are the results.

A hard Twelfth Night

CALGARY — Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* is a strange play, a mixture of the comic and the tragic, of the joyous and the cruel.

In it we see the same type of confusion of identities that forms the backbone of the plays of Plautus and his imitators, including Shakespeare himself in *The Comedy of Errors*.

But in *Twelfth Night* this confusion somehow never becomes the focal point of the action. We become instead involved with the beautiful subplot: the antics of Sir Toby Belch and company, with their plot to overthrow the pompous Malvolio. And it is in the subplot that we become aware of a more serious note, one that is reinforced by the presence of the melancholy clown.

Fortunately the subplot becomes predominant towards the end of the play, and it is this which saved the Stratford Players' production in Calgary last week. The first act

(that is, the first of three divisions) was extremely disappointing, because the players could not cope with the relatively quiet flow of action. From the first moment, when Orsino (Christopher Newton) bellowed out "If music be the food of love, play on!" as if he were crying for a chamberpot, the acting was both weak and, from my point of view, based on a faulty interpretation.

We saw Sebastian (Barry MacGregor), for example, utter his first lines to Antonio like a man completely defeated by the situation; but Sebastian is surely a masterful character, one to be confident and inspire confidence. This is the type of mishandling which plagued the early part of the play.

Sebastian's sister Viola was played by Ann Firbank with considerably more skill, but still did not quite click into place. She was, a suppliant to Olivia, almost whiney; and Olivia (Roberta Maxwell), supposedly the bereaved gentlewoman, came across as a totally calculating, insincere, and unloveable woman.

It was only the appearance of Sir Toby Belch and Sir Andrew Aguecheek which saved the afternoon. Leo Ciceri and Brian Petchey were magnificent in the portrayal of two drunken, bawdy and lecherous degenerates. As Toby, Ciceri combined just the right proportions of boisterousness and shrewdness, and his companion was ideally obsequious and aggressively timorous.

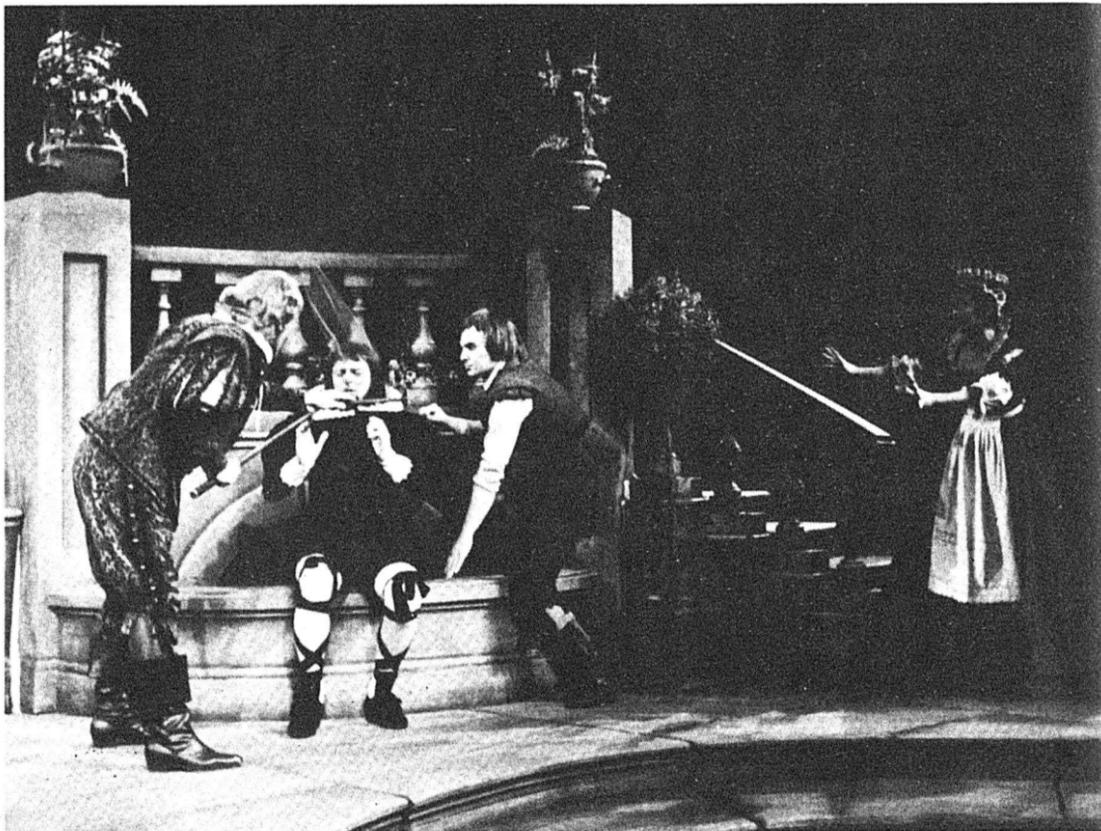
Barbara Bryne, as Maria, was a partner in these goings-on, and was sufficiently lively (bouncy, in fact) for the part. Bernard Behrens was a haughty enough Malvolio, but lacked the touch of effeminacy which makes this character so pitifully humorous.

In short, none of the characterizations were truly memorable, except possibly for the two drunkards. But little fault could be found with the staging. A very cleverly designed set was used throughout the performance, becoming at times a garden, a court, a seashore, and a prison.

The actual set was used to best advantage. Scene flowed smoothly into scene; characters were able to enter, exit, and go aside with a great deal of facility. The garden scene was particularly well handled, the schemers being able to conceal themselves believably while remaining able to pass audible comments on Malvolio's reading of the supposed letter from Olivia.

This, combined with the elegant costuming, very cleverly used lighting, and a large boost on the part of Shakespeare (for it would be quite difficult to make *Twelfth Night* a bad play simply by acting it badly), made the production at least tolerable, and in places quite enjoyable indeed; but on the whole it was a disappointing first encounter with the Stratford Players.

—Terry Donnelly



HA HA HA

... on Malvolio

Comedy a Gogol

Nikolai Gogol's funny-sinister masterpiece of farce, *The Government Inspector*, requires just the sort of teamwork which the touring Stratford Company are giving it.

The civic officials of a small Russian town in the nineteenth century get word that a government inspector will descend upon them in the near future, perhaps incognito, to check into certain "irregularities".

Naturally, since the whole town is grotesquely and flamboyantly corrupt, everybody is sent into a panic.

Into this situation blunders a young man from the Capital: Khlestakov (William Hutt), a minor clerk in the civil service who gives himself aristocratic airs. He has run through his money, and is at the outer limit of his resources when the townspeople jump to the conclusion that he is really the inspector whose coming they dread.

The humor of the play derives from the power of this situation to force both "inspector" and officials to extremes—the officials to extremes of flunkeyism and self-delusion, Khlestakov to extremes in acting out his fantasies of rank and power.

Most of the officials are deliberately one-dimensional caricatures. The exception is the Mayor (Tony van Bridge), who is, with Khlestakov, the play's co-antihero.

Van Bridge plays him as a bustling, bellowing man, shrewd but not intelligent, demonic by virtue of his energy, his self-confidence, and the strength of the human forces he embodies—the old Adam in all of us, our greed, malice and swagger.

Against this, William Hutt's Khlestakov is a perfect balance, with his affectation, his effeminacy, his daydreaming. His considerable energy is all directed towards escaping from life into fake-aristocratic "style"; one of the play's paradoxes is that this style

enables him to function, at least for a time, more successfully than the hard-headed townsmen.

The conflict between the Mayor and Khlestakov—it might be more correct to speak of the conflict between the collective delusion in which both the townspeople and Khlestakov participate in different ways and the bleak realities of which Gogol keeps us constantly in mind—is not really less relevant here and now than it was a hundred years ago in Czarist Russia.

Peter Raby's fine English version of the play projects the vitality of this conflict admirably. I understand that Gogol presents tremendous problems to his translators, and that "free" adaptations are the only practicable solution. As such, Raby's version serves delightfully.

Incidentally, Calgarians (and any Edmontonians who are fleeing Edmonton for Second Century Week) will see, in conjunction with their SCW Drama Seminar, a production of Mavor Moore's reworking of *The Government Inspector* in Western Canadian terms, *The Man from Ottawa*.

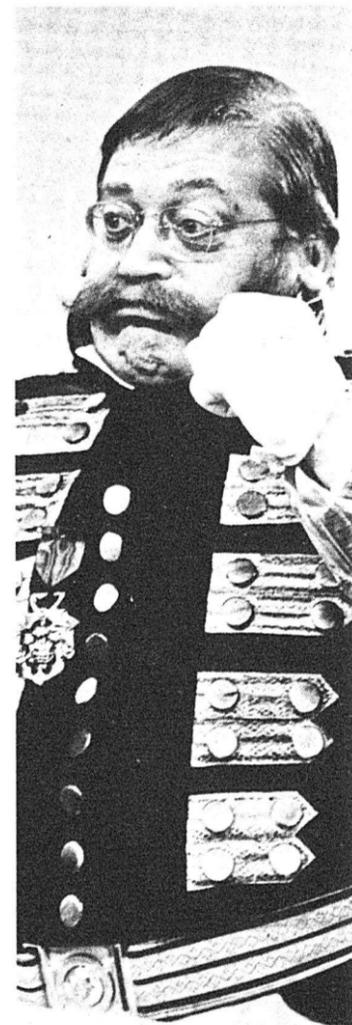
I once heard this done on radio. It's very sweet, but completely misses the most distinctive and valuable quality of Gogol's original—its ruthlessness.

As for the Stratford Company production: the sets are admirably suited for the conventional proscenium stage—as opposed to those for *Twelfth Night*, which, originally designed for Stratford's theatre-in-the-round stage and as such excellent, occasionally involve the actors in turning their backs to the audience, a risky thing to do in the Jubilee Auditoriums.

All you whose tongues are hanging out because you didn't get down to Calgary last weekend—and, despite Terry Donnelly, both Calgary productions were exciting—can take heart: *The Government Inspector* will be done this summer at Stratford, Ont. If you're east, you shouldn't miss it; Hutt and van Bridge are superb at the head

of a superb cast in a superb production of this superb play.

—John Thompson



THE MAYOR
... Tony van Bridge



THE ROGUE
... William Hutt