

Hammy Shaw acting undermines credibility

By J. W. BELTRAME

Arms And The Man, George Bernard Shaw's classic comedy about what happens to the naively romantic Petkoff family when the likeable Chocolate Cream Soldier breaks into their house fleeing from the Bulgarian army, receives an uneven treatment at the Colonnade Theatre.

Director Daniel Berkowitz has every actor regard his character as one-dimensional. While this suits Major Sergius Saranoff (Gordon McGiverin), it is an oversimplification of the play to allow both Captain Bluntshli (Douglas Abel) and Raina (Virginia Reh) to ham their way through the first two acts, making the final act lose its credibility.

ALL LOSERS

The result is that Bluntshli, presented by Shaw as the real alternative between the romantic fool (Sergius) and Nicola, the wholly pragmatic servant, never crystallizes into a real character, and hence is as undesirable as the others.

Bluntshli is presented as a cowardly, chocolate-loving soldier in the first act, an unfeeling pragmatist in the second, and a romantic in the third. None of these roles suits the real Bluntshli, a realist who responds to the situation at hand without false chivalry, but in the most sensible way possible.

Raina, too, is oversold as the hero-worshipping maiden in search of the higher love for the first two acts; by then it becomes too late to bring off her dramatic reversal of form in the final act.

But Gordon McGiverin saves the play with his powerful, forward-march characterization of Sergius. More than

once he steals out attention from the action of the play with his poses and thoughtful reflections, as it slowly dawns on him that the world is not so simple and honest as he thought.

It is only because Arms And The Man is a great play, that it survives as a first class piece of entertainment even when it is badly performed.

DREAM WORLD

Shaw's satirical portrayal of people who build a dream world to replace the cruelty of the real world is just as significant and humorous as when he first wrote it.

While we may have gone beyond the naivety of the Petkoff family, glorification of war, violence, and bloodshed are still with us, giving Arms And The Man relevance some 75 years after it was written.

The Colonnade, at 131 Bloor West, charges students \$2.50 Thursday, Friday and Sunday at 8:30 p.m., and \$3 Saturday at 7 and 9:30 p.m.



Pat McKinley, photo

In our better late than never section, we present a photo from the York Masquers' production of The Apple Tree two weeks ago. Dan Stainton as the

Snake speaks with forked tongue to Erika Rosenfeld as Eve. They are both two weeks older now.

Brecht's Setzuan enjoyable, but interaction missing

By DOUG TINDAL

The production of Bertolt Brecht's The Good Woman of Setzuan at the St. Lawrence Centre is entertaining, but regrettably non-Brechtian.

The Story involves three Gods who come to Setzuan, searching for a good person who is living a life worthy of a human being. They assign this role to Shen Teh, a former prostitute, and give her \$1,000 to help her out.

But Shen Teh is so quickly overrun with beggars and parasites that she is forced to create an alter ego, a ruthless businessman named Shui Ta. Shui Ta puts her affairs in order; but no sooner does she become Shen Teh again, than she is once more overrun, a cycle which drives home impossibil-

ity of being at once good to oneself and to others.

Brecht's characters were created not as discreet individuals, but as units of interaction. Their identities come not so much from their dialogue but from their "Gestus" (vocal tone and body movements). To create the impression Brecht desired, the players must perform in such a way that the audience perceives the characters not so much from the lines they speak, as from the ways they behave toward each other.

It goes without saying that this requires acting of supreme quality: such quality is not found in the St. Lawrence production.

Shen Teh is played competently but un-compellingly by Denise Fergusson. She gives little

scope to the character of Shen Teh, and her changes from Shen Teh to Shui Ta are accomplished mainly by greater voice projection in the case of the latter, thus weakening the fundamental contrast between these characters.

Although this hampers the success of the play in a Brechtian sense, the production is, in itself, well-paced and quite enjoyable. Gerald Parkes, Claude Bede and Richard Monette give first-rate performances as the bumbling ineffectual Gods, and Murray Laufer has designed a corrugated metal set which allows great flexibility in the staging of the scenes.

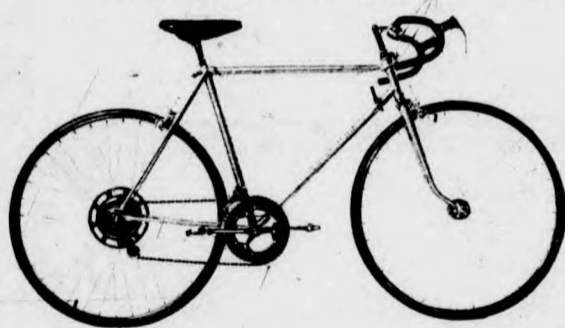
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