

arts & entertainment

One-man play pure, comic entertainment

by Leslie J. Furlong

You've heard it before, that one person whose laughter stands out from everyone else in the audience. It starts out funny or maybe a bit annoying, but over time something about it changes, almost becoming part of the show.

That laughter was present at Neptune Theatre Friday night. At one point during the performance, it finally got to Rod Beattie and his performance stopped dead as he began shivering for several seconds trying to contain himself. Instead of being put off by it, the forgiving audience responded with applause. It was that kind of night.

Letter from Wingfield Farm is a hilarious combination of storytelling and standup comedy. Written by Dan Needles, *Wingfield Farm* chronicles a year in the life of Walt Wingfield, an ex-Bay Street bigwig who, when it all becomes too much for his sanity to handle, gives up his six figures and retreats to the farmland of rural Ontario. The one-man play is structured as a series of letters written to the local weekly newspa-



Rod Beattie as Walt Wingfield.

PHOTO: GEORGE GEORGAKAKOS

per. Each letter serves to chronicle Wingfield's progress as an amateur farmer and introduce the locals that come to his aid.

The play is an even balance between writing and acting. Needles writes each of the letters as miniature plays, filled with comical ob-

servations of the clashes between folk wisdom and urban know how. Rod Beattie, having performed this show over a thousand times, has created a cast of memorable characters, enlivening each with their own distinctive personality and mannerisms, from the straight-edged Walt to the

rural wisdom of the venerable Squire.

The intention of playwright and actor is to get their audience to laugh, and they succeed. In some cases the joke is obvious from the start, but thanks to the delivery and timing of Beattie, he, like any good storyteller, manages to coax the desired reaction from the audience. Think of Bill Cosby in bib overalls.

Rarely does the play drift off course, and when it does it is quick to

re-centre itself. This is the play's greatest strength as well as its greatest weakness. Any opportunity for conflict or something other than laughter is avoided or glossed over in order to get the laugh, but that is more indicative of a lack of pretension than a lack of ability. *Letter from Wingfield Farm* is more comfortable as pure entertainment than as art, and the audience benefits from that distinction.

Summer House fizzles

by Mark Farmer

The Summer House is a mediocre story about a dreamy young Englishwoman, the engagement she stumbles into, and the exotic elderly lady who tries to make sense of the situation for everyone.

Margaret is the young woman, recently come back from an Egyptian holiday. She daydreams about exotic, mysterious Egypt and the equally mysterious man she met there (the flashbacks in the film are visually attractive, and quite funny).

Unfortunately, her fiancé is a hollow boob who blunders his way through life and romance. Margaret's typically English mother Monica is just as shallow.

"What you need is a couple of

babies. That'll stop your dreaming!" she sneers. Unfortunately Margaret can't decide whether to go through with the marriage or enter the convent in Egypt.

Enter Monica's childhood friend, Lily, played with panache by Jeanne Moreau. Lily is instantly likeable, and Moreau gives her an imposing presence on screen — she's witty, flashy and insightful. Like her native Egypt in this film, she's a sensual creature. She wears her sexuality well. Her hot blood contrasts with bland, inhibited, anal England. It's just too bad Lily can't carry the film.

There's nothing really wrong with *The Summer House*, but there's nothing really right with it either, except for Moreau. After a while I just got tired of listening to dialogue that

wasn't going anywhere. It never grabs your attention. There's an interesting rapport between Lily and the groom's mother, and there is an attempt at murder mystery late in the film, but none of it's compelling enough.

I found myself wishing there was more of Egypt in the film; we only get a few tantalizing glimpses of it. As is, the whole thing's a bit too contrived to fly. Rent *Death on the Nile* instead. B

The *Summer House* is playing at Wormwood's Dog & Monkey Cinema Feb 18 - 24.

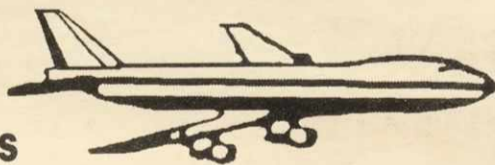
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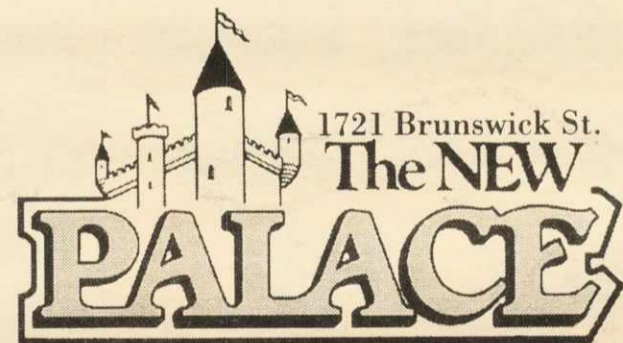
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