

Black Light Theatre: unique and effective

by Alison Manzer

The Black (Light) Theatre of Prague was a unique and worthwhile theatrical experience.

The one aspect of the performance which was indeed unique and effective, was the presentation itself.

The group uses a darkened stage with lights trained on specific actions. These lights include conventional spotlights and also a newer method called "black light". This is ultraviolet light and has the effect of making white cotton appear to glow. Combining this light with fluorescent paints gave the actors and props an eerie, almost magical look.

Another aspect of using the dark stage is that objects could be manipulated by hidden actors, which when dressed in black were effectively invisible. This meant that ordinary cotton sheets, and such, could be made into horses, ghosts and mice, which (as they glowed under the lights) made a startling visual effect.

The uses of such materials did not give a perfect visual impression and thus tended to involve the audience to a great extent in the imagining of situations and objects. This audience involvement was also

enhanced by the use of common situations which were distorted to emphasize a particular point.

The commentaries on contemporary life were emphasized well: the message comes through without the audience being beaten over the head with relevance. Issues such as lack of communication between conversing people were presented entertainingly and yet without losing the message. It was a refreshing change from some contemporary theatre to find that a comment was being given without the entertainment value being lost.

Entertainment did seem to be the main idea behind the entire performance. The majority of sketches in the first section were light and humorous. One in particular used a twist ending to create comedy. "Ghosts" goes through the entire sketch portraying a man plagued by ghosts dancing over his bed during the night; the twist comes when, as morning light begins to spread across the stage, the ghosts turn to rather large mice.

The visual effects were the dominant feature. This was due partly to their uniqueness but the quality of technical performance was an important aspect. The performance ran

smoothly and it was difficult to determine whether there was a stage crew or whether things were just happening on their own. This excellent technique lent an air of credibility to the proceedings.

The entire performance was done without the actors speaking, with the exception of the occasional scream, but could not strictly be called a mime because music was used. The director, Jiri Srnec, managed to achieve a complementary blend of acting and music. This created the necessary integration music into action so that they were indispensable to each other.

The acting itself was superlative and otherwise ridiculous proceedings were carried off flawlessly. The natural air of their acting enabled the audience to accept the situations as they were, rather than dwelling on the absurdity of their nature.

The costuming was not elaborate and could be noted more for the effect of the lighting than for the style or material of the clothes themselves.

The performance was a delightful experience and one which I hope the Metro area will be able to repeat.



(photo/ pacific world artists)

Good grief! DMDS doing "Charlie Brown"

by Stephen R. Mills

"You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown!" a musical written by Charles M. Shultz and featuring his 'Peanuts' comic strip characters will be presented by

the Dalhousie Music and Drama Society January 26 to 30.

The musical, co-directed by Stephanie Reno and Fred Anthony, contains six characters and is basically a series of

'Peanuts' sketches liberally spiced with light songs. DMDS plans to do "Charlie Brown" in the round although the original Broadway production used the traditional proscenium arch.

This is being done to create the feeling of audience involvement in that characters must enter and exit through the audience and competition for a clear view of the stage is all but eliminated. Two casts, one a main cast and the other understudies (with SC Pres. Brian Smith as Snoopy) will be used in an effort to get as many people involved as possible.

The music for the production will hopefully be provided by a small orchestra under the direction of Joyce MacDonald of the Halifax Public Schools music department.

As "Charlie Brown" has been off-Broadway for only half a year, DMDS had to pay a considerable sum for the rights. Despite this, however, the society executive expects to profit from the venture.

When asked why DMDS is tackling so formidable an enterprise, Society president Dave Jones termed it a situation of "survival of the fittest" in an attempt to insure the future success of the Drama Society.

Jones feels that if DMDS can succeed artistically and

financially with "Charlie Brown", they can succeed in the future with less ambitious but perhaps more demanding pieces. He said the usual things about the cast — "enthused, dedicated" — and hoped for more student support than was given DMDS' first production "Bury the Dead" (which incidentally, they hope to perform in Saskatoon shortly).

All the blame cannot be placed with the student body in this regard as publicity for "Dead" was poorly handled. Jones commented on this, saying that "housecleaning" had been done in this department and that a huge campaign was planned for "Charlie Brown" despite the awkward fact that Shultz will not allow his characters to appear in advertising for the musical.

"You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown!" was a smash on Broadway and it will be interesting to see what DMDS — struggling to eliminate the usual notion of a university drama group as a bunch of amateurs producing plays for the hell of it — will do with the musical.

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