

The Gateway fine arts

dumb waiter shows polish at yardbird

Friday's performance of the British playwright Harold Pinter's playlet "The Dumb Waiter" at the Yardbird Suite was one of the most enjoyable of the Suite's productions.

The performance was characterized throughout by an excellent polish, dispelling all doubts about the Suite's production not being professional in finish.

Both actors, Allen Hughes and Wally McSween, and the director, Bob Mumford, showed a rare understanding of the playwright's intentions and ideas.

Thus, the two rôles of the hired killers Ben and Gus were rendered with just the right amount of caricature. Gus, a weak, pathetic nin-compoop, was well acted by Mr. Hughes, who captured the sickly stupidity of this character, half-funny and half-nauseous, and transmitted it well to the audience.

Likewise, Mr. McSween a competent and seasoned actor, brought to life the psychopathic and pugnacious Ben, with however, perhaps too much masculinity coming through the base brutality.

The play itself is typical of Pinter's works, plays of ostensible "kitchen sink" realism, but underneath whose surface always lurks a magical world of symbolism. Compressed, short, of few characters and of limited physical action—yet his plays have a remarkable intensity.

In "The Dumb Waiter", we have all of these elements, and more. The setting is characteristic of Pinter: a small, grubby room in an unnamed location, perhaps a cheap hotel, perhaps a slums rooming house, where two cranky men, Ben and Gus, are found waiting, like Vladimir and Estragon in Beckett's

"Waiting for Godot", for the arrival of a mysterious 'Wilson' who never does come.

The tension grows as the audience is made to take an intimate peek into the lives of the two good-for-nothings, and witness their crude and brutal world of petty conversation saturated with sadistic glee at the misfortunes of others reported in cheap tabloids, tea kettles (a mockery of the British tea ritual) that will not light, toilets that will not flush, stinking feet, and a constant, unnerving dread of being discovered and punished by a nameless power.

In a series of absurd and grotesquely funny episodes, their bizarre humour being quite typical of modern plays since Ionesco, modern Western civilization, symbolized and typified by the gross, materialists, stupid and slobbish Ben and Gus, is mercilessly castigated for its obsession with the brutal, the bestial and the venerable facets of life at the expense of the finer and more spiritual values.

Living in this very basic mode, all of modern man's visions of security suddenly vanish when the hitherto-uninhabited house undergoes a Kafka-like metamorphosis, springing into strange and unexplainable life of self-flushing toilets, mysterious envelopes containing enigmatic matches pushed under the door by a strange hand, a whistling speaking-tube, and a dumb-waiter, its presence justified only by Ben's flimsy guess that the place had once been a "café", moving and delivering orders for food, which the two men cannot fill.

The humor becomes nightmarish when the two start running about in bewildered impotence, trying to substitute their own mouldy tidbits for the international cuisine requested by the dumb-waiter, just to have part of their food sent back.

At the play's climax, when both men are in extreme agitation, Gus goes out to try to prepare the ordered tea, while Ben gets, from the speaking-tube, his final instructions about the murderous mission.

He calls Gus, who staggers in and falls to the ground, Ben's gun pointing at him. We are never sure whether he dies.

Thus is the end. "Not with a bang but a whimper".

—Elan Galper

comics get brickbats from critic

Perhaps the better name for "An Evening with Wayne and Shuster" would have been "Fall Freeze", for the production really amounted to little more than an autumnal version of Spring Thaw.

It had all the same trappings: the take-off on dance routines (ballet this time rather than folk-ensembles), the clever but now wearying catalogue songs, short sketches (a monk who uses all the bells in his tower frantically to call a butler), and comic routines.

But, unfortunately, it didn't have the flash and bite of Spring Thaw. Wayne and Shuster together don't have the talent of Dave Broadfoot or Barbara Hamilton by themselves.

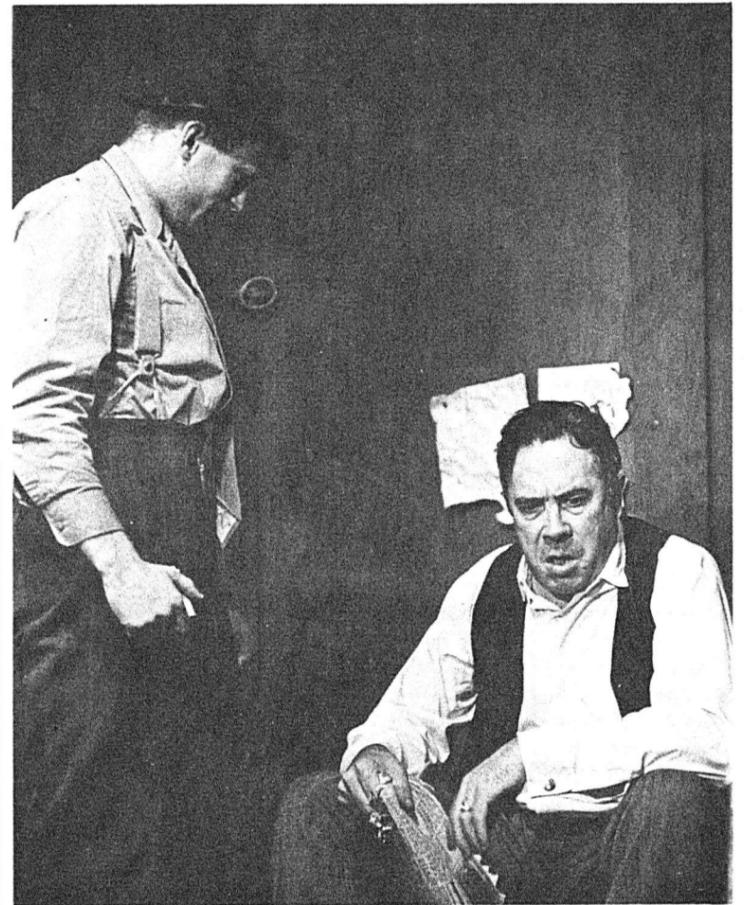
The TV routines we've seen on CBC productions and the Ed Sullivan Show were there (the Shakespearean Baseball Game and The Cartwheels) and some fresh material written by Stan Daniels, but there wasn't enough of the new to make up for the repetitions of the old. And the cast including Marilyn Stuart and Jack Duffy was the same Spring Thaw cast.

Wayne and Shuster should have enough of a draw name that the inferiors in the cast don't have to be draws as well. In a nation that is trying to bring forth new talent (and there's a lot of it around) surely Wayne and Shuster could have brought us some new faces in doing their bit for the entertainment industry in Canada. I don't mind Jack Duffy, and I have a real affection for Miss Stuart, but somewhere in this big country there are others who need exposure too.

And the material? Pretty low stuff, most of it. Travesties of My Fair Lady and Bonanza that didn't really make any satiric or comic points about the originals, but were used as springboards for weak word-play and vaudeville gags.

To use a comparison which should have some meaning, Wayne and Shuster give us an adolescent Mad Magazine style of humor, flashy, superficial, and ephemeral, rather than a sophisticated, clever, witty and sharp Esquire style of humor. It's a very comfortable sort of humor, so comfortable that you never feel it, never taxing, never trying, never really very, very funny.

It may be all right for Toronto where people are more prepared to accept anything so long as it's done by people from Toronto (in the same way that some of us are inclined to accept anything so long as it comes from Edmonton, to judge by some of the statements made on Jim Stanley's open line program on CHED). But for us in the sticks? Touring companies should know by now that television brings us the same things that the people of Toronto watch, that they do us no favor by giving us second-hand material that was very well received in New York.



—Scarth photo

THE DUMB WAITER—Allen Hughes and Wally McSween in Harold Pinter's play at the Yardbird Suite. (See story this page.)

To paraphrase some of Wayne and Shuster's material:

Caesar went to the Forum,
Lancelot met Guinevere,
Napoleon had Waterloo,
and Wayne and Shuster were here.

Humor has changed a good deal in the past twenty years. Mort Sahl and Beyond the Fringe are now the mass products and television is really the outback. Unfortunately that's where Wayne and Shuster belong: in a place where they can be turned off.

—Jon Quill

first recital highlights two city artists

Young Edmonton artists Tamara Fahlman and Michael Massey appeared Friday night in the first recital of the Women's Musical Club 1965-66 Series. The program consisted of works by Veracini, Mozart, Beethoven, Bach, and Prokofiev.

Miss Fahlman, sixteen-year-old winner of the \$500 Condell Memorial Scholarship, exhibited a good command of her instrument and a musicianship far beyond her years. Her presentation of Veracini's Largo, in particular, was poignant and moving. Despite a few technical difficulties in the Mozart Fourth Violin Concerto, she ef-

fectively conveyed her excellent grasp of that master's style.

But it was in the Beethoven Sonata in G Major for violin and piano that Miss Fahlman really hit her stride. The last movement especially was vigorous and exciting, and throughout the work Miss Fahlman and her accompanist, Vera Shean, played with commendable rapport. The young violinist's rendition of the March from "The Love for Three Oranges", by Prokofiev, was appropriately diabolical.

The most impressive thing about Miss Fahlman's recital, however, was her innate musicality and good taste, which suffused the whole of her program.

She is a musician of great promise, and, given time, will certainly become a first-rate artist. Miss Fahlman will continue her studies at the Julliard School of Music in New York.

Michael Massey, runner-up for the Condell Memorial Scholarship, played Beethoven's Piano Sonata Op. 81A, "Les Adieux", as well as three movements from Bach's Fourth Piano Partita.

Both selections were tastefully performed, although Mr. Massey was hindered by a rather over-resonant piano.

The Bach, the Gigue in particular, was played a little bit muddily, but the Beethoven had an admirable romantic sweep.

The acoustics in Con Hall are anything but ideal at the best of times, and the skimpy audience attending the recital made things even worse than usual. As a result, the performances were attended by an annoying hollow echo.

The next recital in the series will take place on November 19, and will feature pianist Sandra Munn.

—Bill Beard

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