

entertainment

Country Wife reincarnated at York

By Michael Christ

William Wycherley's geriatric play, *The Country Wife*, positively struts across the stage in its present reincarnation on the Burton stage.

Revived and invigorated by Neil Freeman's direction and the youth of its Theatre Department cast, the 17th century *Country Wife* is a testimony to the timelessness of man's more playful spirit. Gambling, bawdy, and always sly, the play is the story of two young gallants and their successful bid for the love of other men's wives.

In the traditional commedia pattern of debauchery, the young lovers are united with the aid of zany doctors and scheming maids, passion proves stronger than the bonds of marriage founded on convenience, and cuckoldry is proven to be a way of life. All this is delivered with the characteristic Restoration wit which hones itself on the hypocrisy inherent in the age.

The Restoration was an age - like our own - of contradiction. Fashions gave emphasis to the female bust; that same fashion dictated that a woman of honour

should shield her face in a mask. Speech was marked by cultivated restraint, but the intent was often aggressive, sometimes lewd. Prose and music, to generalize, were studiously mannered, again in contradiction to the primal urges of the Restoration lower life which strained for freedoms after almost half a century of Puritan rule.

In Burton auditorium, a real sense of that struggle for freedom was clearly expressed. Glimpses of voluptuousness which are only hinted at in Wycherley's prose were broadened into irrevocable statements, statements that never exceeded the limits of dramatic good taste. A brilliant musical accompaniment by John Welch captured the theme of the era in the largest way possible as brittle whisps of period music gave way to the sensuous groundswell of modern jazz.

R. Bruce Specht's highly mobile set virtually dances into place between scenes with the aid of Welch's music. The change of scenery is sometimes a welcome

diversion in a five-act play which runs for considerably longer than three hours. After staring at the same set for almost one-quarter of one's waking hours, any change of costume is also a welcome diversion - Jill Johnston's designs were not in vain. On its own merits, the Wycherley play is far from being a masterpiece in dramatic writing. The playwright paces his humour badly and opens with a dazzling first-act of one-liners and inverted aphorisms which creates an expectation which is unfulfilled in later acts. With the wit running less dense in the middle acts, the successful resolution of the plot in the last act is the play's saving grace. This is a play that should have been rewritten but wasn't.

Directorial touches can save a play - and they did. Enlarging upon Harriet Applebaum's rhythmical search for crockery and providing Lee Patterson with a puppet, were two of many touches Neil Freeman provided for his actors and actresses. Some fine performances by the graduating performance class.

A thoroughly good production.



Keith Segal photo

Cabaret's Blessings witty, cute

By Cynthia Rantoul

There were many aspects of Cabaret's "Mixed Blessings" that confirmed the effort that went into it by Pam Mingo and Cathy Knights. Cute is perhaps the best description, with more than one moment of wit to keep the audience's attention. It was to the writers' credit that they stayed with a topic they knew, borrowed songs that were reasonably easy to handle and did not overstay their welcome.

Cathy Knights defined the difference between theatrical background and simple enthusiasm. Not once did she wander out onto a limb and attempt anything new and perhaps more difficult. Put in contrast with Pam Mingo, one was left with the feeling that some planning went on of which Pam was totally unaware.

Pam, on the other hand, held all the difficult and generally pronounced parts which more than once were beyond her training. However, what she lacked in ability she carried with vitality, and only an educated ear was able to discern her faults. Interaction between the two flowed well and showed where the majority of time in rehearsal must have been spent.

The biggest disappointment was the role of the musicians as a complement to the actresses. Not only was their timing poor but often their seemingly spontaneous report was forced and unintelligible. It might have been an improvement to have let them perform their music capably and left the acting to those on stage.



Bob Ryan photos

The first half of the show, highlighted by a cleverly staged song called 'Femininity', left little doubt that the writing and acting were a workable combination. The rest of the production fell short of this simple goal. There was a feeling that the writers were stretching a sound idea far beyond its limits.

The final song, a tribute to this illustrious newspaper, was a pleasant ending despite the fact that there was no correlation between it and the rest of the production. The only regret is that they did not have the common good sense to know that it could stand on its own merit.



Mingo and Knights send up Excalibur

Fowles' new heights

Daniel Martin By John Fowles
Reviewed by Andrew Nikiforuk

John Fowles is one of those rare authors that has mastered writing both as a means of expression and as an expression of meaning. In *The Magus* and *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, he demonstrated this mastery with a grace and integrity few Western writers ever achieve. Now in his most recent novel, *Daniel Martin*, he has attempted to attain an even greater unity. He succeeds in this endeavour with an intelligence and deftness that marks an exceptional writer.

The novel begins with the phrase: "Whole sight; or all the rest is desolation." While these words aptly express Fowles' goal as novelist, they also represent the predicament of the main character. Daniel Martin is an playwright turned-screen writer who is at odds with himself and his profession. His relationships with women are as deceptive and temporal as his films. Martin is a middle-aged man who has lost sight and purpose. The sudden death of an old acquaintance begins for Martin an odyssey of resolutions, of hazard and of movement. In the course of this journey he is reunited with the only woman he ever loved. Like Martin she too has grown to be a stranger to herself. Her own reclamation both generates and becomes part of Martin's rediscovery. This forms the basis of a very complex yet immensely readable novel.

Fowles succeeds in giving Martin whole face and heart by presenting him through his own first-person descriptions, the comments of his young mistress and Fowles' own stringent observations. Consequently, Martin comes across as an all-together-too human figure. One neither likes him nor hates him. The reader recognizes Martin's deceptions and his excuses as very familiar and mortal transgressions.

Though Fowles is not a Marxist, he achieves in his novels what every true Marxist seeks, "a restoration of the human world and of human relationships to man himself". This explains why relations between men and women dominate his novels, and why he is indisputably a great artist.

Inside looking out

By Colin Smith

Short Eyes is an uncompromising stare at prison life. The film offers situations with no solutions. It holds little for the flagrant thrill-seeker. It gives us only an intimate look into the daily goings-on of a typical cell block. Its handling of this material can only be described as delivering a filmic punch in the stomach.

Originally a play, *Short Eyes* has made a smooth transition to the screen. Written by Miguel Pinero (who was in *Sing Sing* at the time; he is presently up on fresh charges) the play-film is a harsh, obscenity-laden look at Clark Davis (Bruce Davison) and his relationships with other cell block members. Davis, a hung-up young man with a wife and family, has been detained under charges of child molestation ("short eyes" is prison slang for such a person.) Child molesters being the lowest of the low in prison society, he is quickly segregated by the other inmates and brutally harrassed. The tensions in the film culminate in a sickening climax, and a quietly horrid denouement.

Stylistically, the film is steadily on the beam. Director Robert M. Young captures well the languid boredom and violent undertones of prison life. The changes in rhythm are expertly handled (kudos to the editors). Toward the end one feels

distinctly claustrophobic, the result of having watched every fourth shot being taken through bars and the camera never having left a hundred-square-foot area. Pinero's screenplay nicely details the minor-league sociopolitical strata and tensions between hispanic-black-white colour groups. Curtis Mayfield's score is quietly beneficial, except in the film's one lapse near the middle; a musical set-to between groups of cons that adds little to the film except running time.

Performances are uniformly excellent. Davison, remembered as the neurotic in *Willard* with a power over rats, provides much substance and pathos to the character of Clark Davis. Also noted should be Jose Perez as the reluctant receptacle for Davis' emotions; Natham George and Don Blakely as two of the more militant blacks; Shawn Elliott as a high-strung homosexual creep; and especially Joseph Carberry, whose malignant Longshoe Murphy provides much of the movie with its electric tension and horror. Pinero himself does an engaging bit as an obnoxious wheelerdealer named GoGo. His removal from the block, a violently nasty piece of scheming engineered by the other cons, is an ominous foreshadowing of the conclusion to this gross and overpowering film.

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