

Much Ado About Nothing minor Shakespeare gets the full Stratford treatment

by Ira Nayman

Much Ado is the least of Shakespeare's comedies, which are his least important works. The story involves two couples: the first, initially hostile, are tricked into falling in love; the second, engaged to be married, are momentarily divided by an evil prince with too much time on his hands.

It isn't much: there are no brooding Danes or mad Kings (or observations of the human condition). However, somebody at Stratford appears to have decided to concentrate on Shakespeare's lesser known works this season (I mean, really: *Timon of Athens*?), so this is what we get.

Stratford being Stratford, even Shakespeare's lesser works get major production. Director Richard Monette keeps things

theatre

Much Ado About Nothing
written by William Shakespeare
directed by Richard Monette
Stratford's Festival Theatre

moving on stage, with groups of maids, servants, hunting attendants and others moving on and off.

Robin Fraser Paye's design is sumptuous. The costumes are colourful and the set, with stairs leading to a balcony overhanging a doorway, is evocative and effective.

The most visually satisfying scene involves a candlelit procession to a tomb, using spotlights and blue filters to establish a 'down' mood (don't worry: the mood is not sustained for long, this being a comedy). It is an

arresting image which stays in your mind long after you've left the theatre.

The performances are energetic. Goldie Semple stands out as Beatrice; her comic timing is impeccable. Colm Feore, as her reluctant husband-to-be, initially appears to be overmatched, but he manages to carry some hilarious scenes before the play ends.

Honourable mention should go to Brian Bedford, who has a lot of fun with the part of the stupid Chief Constable Dogberry. The audience's reception of Bedford seemed too enthusiastic for what is, after all, a minor part (do Shakespearean actors have groupies?); nonetheless, it was an enjoyable turn.

There was one annoying problem with this production. The Festival Theatre stage is sur-



Goldie Semple and Colm Feore are the charming, funny stars of *Much Ado About Nothing*. The play is aptly named, but somehow takes on the image of High Art due to Stratford's typically opulent production.

rounded on three sides by the audience; playing to one side, the actors necessarily have to turn their backs on the other making their words inaudible.

But this is a minor quibble. Stratford's current production of *Much Ado About Nothing* is proof that huge talent can overcome minor material.

arts

One stop comedy shopping

by Stephen Balsky

The latest Second City tour de farce, *Shopping Off To Buffalo*, is crammed with innovative sketches typical of the famous comedy troupe, most of it side-splitting.

The title sketch involves a macho cowboy-type angry about his wife's perceived infidelities. Clutching the tell-tale credit card receipts in hand, he demands an explanation.

"All right," the woman replies, "I confess, I was shopping in Buffalo."

This sketch prepares the audience for what is to come — a series of political and social insights twisted with the inimitable Second City wit.

In another sequence, the touchy subject of race relations is parodied. The scene involves an Indian cab driver taking an English woman to a concert (a la *Driving Miss Daisy*). The two engage in occasionally witty conversation about the culture of others.

On the musical side, there is a terrific send-up of how Madonna has made women seem like mindless sex objects, and a square dance involving United Nations members. These routines are well-directed by award-winning Second City veteran Sandra Balcouske.

Shopping Off To Buffalo, like most Second City reviews, contains the occasional clunker. I disliked the scene involving a shopper in Eaton's being accosted by two Nazi-like cosmetic salespersons who want her to try on new facial creams. The joke makes an analogy between the application of make up and torture. The sketch was a waste of the talented cast's time and effort.

The momentum picks up, however, in a sketch in the second half of the show involving a wide variety of fathers urging their children on at a little league softball game. Noteworthy is Christopher Earle's performance as a post-Woodstock yuppie who, when an umpire's call go against his offspring, shouts, "What are you? Visually challenged?"

theatre

Shopping Off to Buffalo
written by the Second City Company
directed by Sandra Balcouske
The Old Fire Hall

Ed Sahely also shines as the familiar competitive slob of a father trying to get his macho son Butch to show up the other kids or he'll "put the dog to sleep."

Every Monday through Thursday there is a free improvisational set where the cast plays theatre sports on topics the audience sug-

gests. Two guest stars, veteran Second City member Tim Sims and *Meatballs* co-star Chris Makepeace, joined the troupe's improv efforts. The best of these described a bridge game played by royalty out of William Shakespeare.

An exciting cast and their clever routines, make the latest effort out of the Old Firehall worth checking out. The show runs indefinitely at 110 Lombard Street. For more information, call the Old Firehall, 863-1111.

Commemorating a massacre

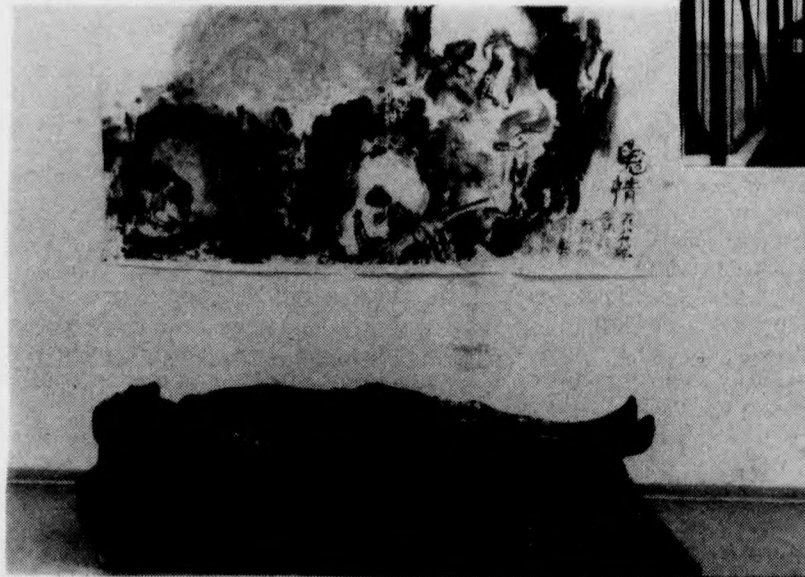
Tiananmen Memorial Exhibition
June 1-8 at Studio 205, 1400 Dupont St.

Toronto artist and York professor Bruce Parsons recently organized a show in memory and protest of the mass murder of Chinese student activists two years ago on 4 June 1989.

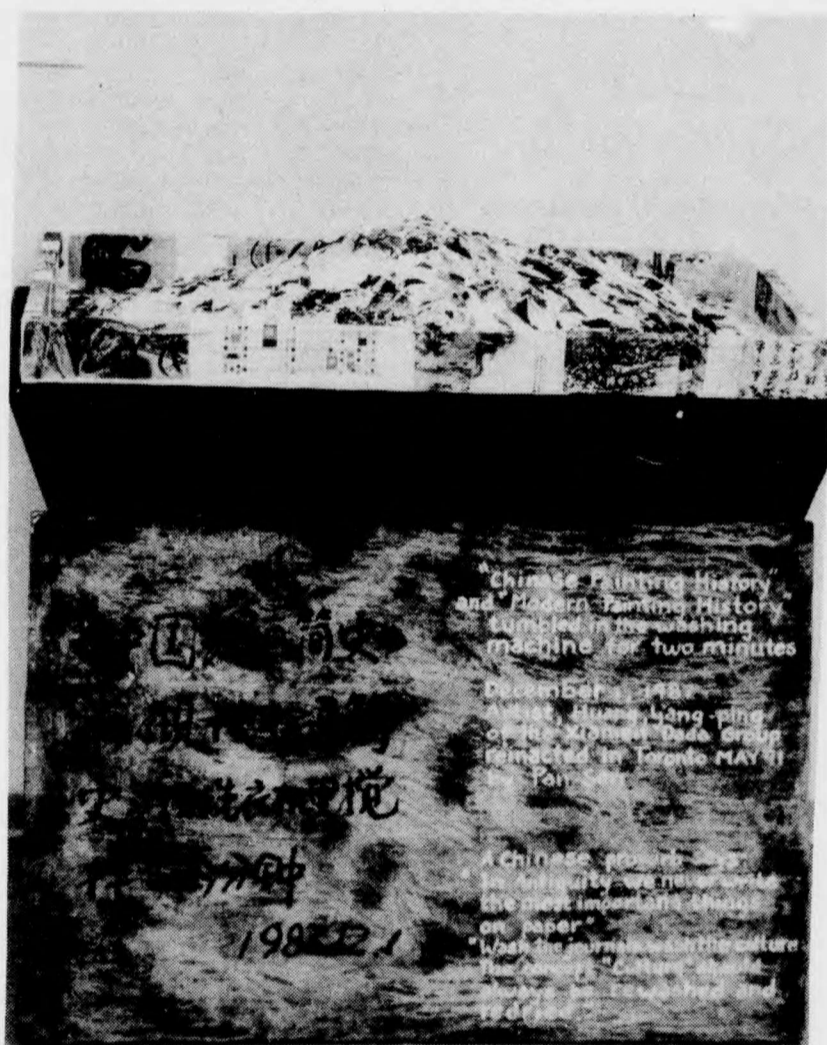
Included were works by Chinese expatriate artists as well as those still living in China. Evident throughout the show is the rage and pain that is still very present in the worldwide community.

Works included are (from left) "Big Character Man," a sculpture by Peng Han Sheng; an anonymous sculptural installation which was used in the Tiananmen protest actions in Toronto this year; and "Xiamen" by Yang Ping Huang of the Xiamen Dada group.

"Xiamen" consists of pages from Chinese and western art history books tumbled in the washing machine for 2 minutes ("We never write the most important things on paper.").



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