

The Gateway fine arts

a poet's eye well focused

For over three hours I sat entranced by the intricately interlaced imagery that vibrated, sometimes electrically, back and forth across the stage and out into the audience; and then with one last despairing picture it was over.

The curtain had fallen on Studio Theatre's exciting production of "The Three Sisters" by Anton Chekhov.

It was an evening not to be easily forgotten; an excellent cast under fine, sensitive direction carried me through a wonderful and moving exploration of the complexities and futilities of life as seen through a great poet's eyes.

And Chekhov is definitely a poet; not merely the realistic writer we often think of him as, but a sensitive perceiver of life with a superb gift for putting it on the stage in a way that subtly stirs man's deepest thoughts on this existence.

Chekhov presents a vision of life, full or passivity, cheap golden philosophy, isolation, and always a despairing hope.

That this vision penetrated the hearts and minds of the audience was in no small measure due to the quality of the production.

It was not a perfect production to be sure, and let me tear off what small amounts of flesh I must before I praise, since most of the show deserves nothing but praise.

My first and most general objection is that the performance did not go deep enough. There were moments when I wanted much more depth of feeling and motivation, particularly in the last act.

I wanted more reaction to the off-stage shot, the only true act of violence in the play; I wanted more torments of sorrow and more frustrated hope from the three sisters as they are left alone (though I must thank Miss Susan

McFarlane who, as Masha, had the depth I had hoped to see more often from more people).

And I must criticize the sets of Act 3 and Act 4 in that they were slightly sloppy or incomplete; if the commitment to realism is made it must be carried through. The commitment was made with an excellent set for Acts 1 and 2.

The ingenuity displayed in presenting three complex sets on such a small and inadequate stage was marvellous, but the problems were not overcome completely.

But now to the praise.

Costuming was brilliant, with minute perfection in design, colour and detail. The lighting was fine, particularly in such details as sunlight and moonlight through curtained windows, and an effective projection of a forest in the last act.

But most of the praise must go to the play and the performance. I have already singled out Susan McFarlane as Masha, the second eldest of the three sisters. Miss McFarlane gave one of the most exciting performances of the evening.

Kenneth Kramer as Masha's husband Kulygin made one realize that acting can be an art; his voice, movement and interpretation were fluid and integrated, yet there was always the necessary depth below.

Max Planinc as the nihilistic Dr. Tchebutykin was delightfully charming and yet so moving when we see his drunken disillusionment. In Act 3 he cries despairingly, "Oh, if only I didn't exist".

In the smaller roles I must mention Renee Laird, Alexander Diakun, and Stuart Gillard, all of whom did extremely well.

I mention the above because they were particularly effective in their roles, but there were no weak links in a chain of strong and polished actors. They all helped to knit the fabric of the piece; a fabric of images, fragments of poetry and almost supernatural feelings.

I particularly remember the image of Fedotik (Stu Gillard) stumbling into the room laughing hysterically after losing his house in the fire and then quietly beginning to weep; or Solyony (Isidore Gliener) as he awaits the duel with Tusenbach (Dough Riske) rubbing his hands with perfume because "they smell . . . the smell of a dead body."

And I could go on and on about cameras and clocks and counterpoint emotion, but I could not do justice to what I saw. As the production affected me I wanted more, but by what I achieved I will long be haunted.

—Robert Mumford

the skonk works smell of success

Will success spoil Varsity Varieties?

This was the question on everyone's lips following the closing curtain of this year's Varsity Guest Weekend extravaganza, Li'l Abner.

In the past, shows have been everything from charmingly mediocre to smelly, and no one ever got very excited. This year was different.

Phil Silver's actors, Cec Pretty's singers, and Jeremy Leslie-Spinks' dancers got together on some production numbers that put a permanent gleam in the eyes of the New Zealand Terror, and the Journal review of the show was anything but unenthusiastic.

The audience, too, sat right up (which is nearly impossible to do in Jubilee Auditorium plush-buckets) and paid attention when characters like Marryin' Sam (Glen Reid), Available Jones (Barry Cooper) and Evil Eye Fleagle (Don Sorochan) came on.

Sorochan was the hit of the evening—he twitched in all the right spots, wore his 36-inch shoulders like he was born with them, and left a pleasant authentic order of rotting flesh every time he left the stage.

The only disappointment of the show was that the script was a bit dated. Some of the actors helped it along with local grace notes about the Edmonton Eskimos and root beer establishments, but the references to Herbert Hoover left most of the pre-pubertal audience unamused.

Also, the usual lack of singing talent manifested itself, and the only song of the evening that came up to par was 20 seconds of "What's good for General Bullmoose is good for the U--S--Aaaa!"

However, we can say that this was still the best singing cast in the past three years, and if things continue to improve at the present rate the show will be in the Met by 1968.

entirely too plane a bisector

David Sector's "Winter Kept Us Warm," is an interesting bad film. Student Cinema must be congratulated on having brought it to Edmonton, and Sector must be congratulated on having made it for peanuts; but I can't say it convinced or moved me.

The film deals with the relationship between two boys, one brash and insecure, the other shy but basically stable. Usually when one makes a statement like this about a movie it's a drastic oversimplification, but WKUW is just that schematic, that flat.

Latent homosexuality on the part of the brash boy livens things up a bit, but is really even more of a cliché than the basic weaker-shown-to-be-stronger plot it embellishes.

Of course plot and character "cliché" (the architypal) is at the basis of the great films too. The root of WKUW's weakness is cliché at a more dangerous level—that of its language.

The script burdens the actors with fake naturalistic dialogue, which they try to deliver "convincingly". They would have done better to have kept their distance from it, to have mocked it as they spoke. They would have done even better to have thrown it all away and either improvised or gotten somebody to write then a literate script.

Some day Mr. Sector will learn that people speak much more unusually than he thinks, and that reducing speech to a characterless set of conventional phrases produces a less realistic effect than does orchestrating speech very carefully, whether in the manner of a Shaw or of an Albee.

The incidents Mr. Sector has chosen to illustrate the progress of the two boy's winter are often as banal as the dialogue.

The scene in which the shy boy,



—Dave Blackmore photo

ONE SISTER, ONE SISTER-IN-LAW—Proving that one may smile and smile and be a villain, Marrie Goodine, right, beams at Lois Sulyma in Thomas Peacocke's Studio Theatre production of Chekhov's "The Three Sisters." The fact that Miss Goodine is dressed in absolutely dreadful taste at this moment in the play may not strike the unobservant Gateway reader; but we must remember Chekhov's intentions and not get carried away by Surface Charm.

working as a waiter in the residence dining hall (shades of Lister, I don't think!) gets powered by our other hero in our old, old joke. This wouldn't matter if it were played merely for laughs, but we're expected to take it as a bit of Naturalism, which it simply isn't.

And I'm getting a bit sick of rollicking-in-the-park-in-the-glorious-spring sequences, though the brief appearance of a Toronto squirrel cheered me up.

Let me make it clear that what's wrong with WKUW isn't its unreality but its reluctance to admit to, and to play with, this unreality.

So many things have been sacrificed to Authenticity: a well-shaped plot, suspense, wit, significance—I don't know precisely why, but it struck me after a while that what happened to the two boys didn't matter, perhaps because it was too utterly predictable—and above all beauty, both of word and of image.

And what, after all, is so splendid about authenticity?

The lives of the students I know aren't a bit authentic. They're unpredictable, dramatic, wildly tragicomic, deathly dull, full of both an activity and a quietness of which Sector has given us only the faintest glimpse.

I refuse to believe that my acquaintanceship is unusually wild. I would rather believe that the "authenticity" that Sector claims to strive for is nothing

more than a shallow, and often inaccurate, rendering of a drastically but non-artistically simplified situation.

Perhaps I should close by hinting at how I think the film's theme could better have been handled.

Sector failed to convince me that his story, as it stands, is a tragic one. Surely the switching of roles that gives the plot what shape it has is basically the stuff of comedy.

The brash boy should, I think, be treated as a villain. His initial assurance should be magnificently sickening, so that, to a point at least, we cheer his disintegration.

The quiet boy is rather obviously a hero even in Sector's version (and as a result is by far the most satisfying element in the film). He could perhaps be played more as a holy fool; but on this I wouldn't insist.

The setting, too, should be played for laughs; and what better city for the purpose than Toronto? A lot more could be done with the squirrels, and for that matter with the university, which provides backgrounds for Sector's film without really being used to much artistic purpose.

Perhaps a few subplots, certainly some more solid minor characters . . . But enough! I hope Sector goes on to better things, by his own paths. It's just that this particular path looks like a dead end.

—J. O. Thompson