

Virginia Woolf revived at Truck, nearly dies in reproduction

By BOB MCBRYDE

To witness a production of Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, perhaps any production, is to realize the playwright's mastery of verbal nuance, and of dramatic confrontation.

The play moves through three increasingly sinister rites with painful deliberation: the theatrical experience is one of general unmasking. Albee forces us to face a life without illusion by mirroring, in his characters, our insignificance.

The Toronto Truck Theatre's production of this astounding play reiterates one's sense of its dramatic richness. Their interpretation is bold

enough to raise our expectations: it is also so deficient in most areas as to disappoint most acutely.

It is difficult to fault a company for an excess of ambition. Yet, after having chosen to present Virginia Woolf, producer-director Peter Peroff was forced to draw from a limited pool of talent, actors who might convincingly portray characters of extreme emotional and psychological complexity. The result is a series of uneven performances. Some of those involved are neither suited physically nor emotionally for their parts.

Martha Ellen Martinak, as a lithe Martha, is not only physically un-

sued to the role, but develops only half the character. She is sufficiently coarse, to the point of becoming brutally so, but she allows to lie fallow that child-like side of Martha's character which the playwright has intended to lurk beneath the barnacles. When she delivers poignant lines they are spit out as if from a power motor.

With this dimension of the play lost, the burden of saving the play falls upon the other characters. With one exception, they succeed adequately if not admirably well. Although Lee Martel is more insipid than stud-like as Nick, the ambitious biology instructor, his male adversary, George, played by Tom O'Hanley, simply shines.

Gaining strength as the play progresses, O'Hanley captures the rhythms of his many difficult speeches and conveys through them a broad range of thoughts and emotions. Ben Znidar as Nick's "wifelet" Honey is also able to portray a subtly complex character.

Director Peroff has blocked the play admirably well, capturing the characters' emotional flux through the stage language of movement. He seems, however, to have failed to exploit the powers of silence: the play's pace is one of sustained frenzy.

As an evening of theatre, the Truck theatre's production remains, when all is said and done, eminently worthwhile. Albee's mastery shines through the faults of the production.

The play runs until October 12 at the Colonnade theatre; student tickets are \$3.50. Phone 925-4573.



Pictured here is the oh-so-subtle Lily, (Amy Stage), a typical floozy who will be appearing with Lou tonight and tomorrow night in *The Goldiggers of 1898*. You may catch them at 9 and 10:30 p.m. at the Open End Coffee Shop in Vanier. Admission is free. Information 661-4973.

Sudden slides, gumball slips enrapture in "Rabbi" Jacob

By WARREN CLEMENTS

One of the secrets of Louis de Funes' success is the fact that whenever you try to describe one of his films, you're amazed that all those little incidents could have been squeezed into a two-hour period.

In each of his comedies, most recently *The Mad Adventures of "Rabbi" Jacob*, every moment either builds toward a joke or tops a preceding punch-line.

Imagine de Funes as French Bigot, trapped in a deserted factory and being pursued by a group of murderous thugs. The factory, with more chutes and floors than the engine room of an ocean liner, manufactures purple American bubblegum.

During the course of a 10-minute chase, at least six people slide through a long tunnel and fall into a molten, bubbling vat of gum. Each time the scene is hilarious. And each time, between falls, there have been enough distracting bits of humour and suspense to make us forget that the vat is still waiting.

When two of the pursuers are tripped up by millions of tiny gumballs, and slide hopelessly backward onto a conveyor belt and then into a chute, it takes us a minute to realize that we've seen that chute before. Then comes the joy of realization that it leads to the vat; the joy is doubled when we envision what's going to happen; and the joy is unbounded when the inevitable finally occurs.

The plot of "Rabbi" Jacob is constructed with the intricate precision of a Swiss watch, which is not to say that it is any particular masterpiece of scriptwriting.

This genre of gallic farce is as old as Moliere and his ancestors, and dabbles with such requisite devices as mistaken identities (de Funes is forced to masquerade as a visiting rabbi from America), minor love interests and major set-ups (the gum factory, a floating car, a packed synagogue).

There's the screaming, jealous French wife, the pug-ugly sneering hood, the wise-cracking foil for de Funes (his chauffeur, who turns out to be Rabbi's Jacob's nephew), and a host of stuffed shirts.

As usual, the show revolves around de Funes, (best remembered for *La Grande Vadrouille*, with Terry-Thomas), an aging but incredibly energetic farceur with a rubber face and repertoire of mimic sleights and double-takes.

"Rabbi" Jacob is not a classic, or anything approaching a classic. It has its predictable jokes and its occasional saccharine moments.

But it is a deftly made and very funny model of the sort of comedy which has been keeping French audiences queuing up for and rolling on the floor at Louis de Funes' numerous filming outings. The comedy, subtitled at the Yorkdale, travels very well.

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