

*As You Like It* and *Lorenzaccio* by Alfred de Musset.



Regan, Lear, Cornwall, and Kent.

Charles Lamb once wrote that *King Lear* is impossible to stage. He preferred the production he staged in his imagination to any real production. He may have had a point. The play is enormously difficult. It is a story of treachery, madness and sadistic cruelty. It begins with a ritualistic scene in which the old King divides his kingdom between two of his daughters and banishes the third, most loving daughter because she refuses to indulge in the unctuous flattery he demands. It involves two of the most surrealistic characters that Shakespeare ever created — Lear's court fool and Mad Tom of Bedlam. These characters join their voices to the raving of the mad King during the storm which dominates the play's central action. The Earl of Gloucester has his eyes gouged out on stage. Later he is tricked into believing that he has leapt from a cliff when, in fact, he has simply fallen flat on his face. At the end, the most sympathetic character in the play, Lear's good daughter Cordelia, is murdered. Lear dies. Kent's remark summarizes the grim view of life that the play seems to express: "He hates him that would upon the rack of this tough world stretch him out longer."

Where *King Lear* is concerned, perhaps there are no unqualified successes, only different degrees of failure. Stratford's *Lear* is as good a production as is likely to be staged for some time. Edgar and Edmund have been miscast, but otherwise the roles vary from strong to superb. William Hutt is a fine Lear though less so during the storm scenes when he has to shout for sustained periods over the thunderous storm created by the sound effects department. Pat Galloway as Goneril is entirely convincing. Edward Atienza as the Fool turns in a performance of outstanding brilliance.



Rosalind and Orlando.

*As You Like It* fully lives up to its title. It is a lively performance staged with 18th-century costumes which bring out the pretty artificiality of themes like the court versus the simple life, and the happy agonies of young lovers. Edward Atienza is superb as Touchstone

the clown — surely he is the most exciting newcomer to the Stratford Festival in several years. But there are really no false notes. It will be a rare and sour Jacques of a theatre-goer who does not join in the standing ovation that follows Rosalind's closing speech:

If I were a woman, I would kiss as many of you as had beards that pleas'd me, as complexions that lik'd me, and breaths that I defied not; and I am sure, as many as have good beards, or good faces, or sweet breaths, will for my kind offer, when I make curtsy, bid me farewell.

A murky exploration of villainy and assassination in the wicked old days of Renaissance Florence, *Lorenzaccio* was written in the 19th century by the French poet Alfred de Musset. Sara Bernhardt was the first *Lorenzaccio*, and women have been playing the role since then.



*Lorenzaccio*, Gionio, and Alessandro.

Stratford's *Lorenzaccio* is Pat Galloway who thoroughly redeems two rather mediocre performances last year as Lady Macbeth and the Duchess of Malfi. *Lorenzaccio* both hates and loves Alessandro, the bastard ruler of Florence. Alessandro has corrupted *Lorenzaccio*'s youthful idealism by showing him what a vile lot his fellow Florentines really are. At the same time Alessandro is a man of action in a world of talkers. Before *Lorenzaccio* finally dispatches Alessandro and is, in turn, assassinated, de Musset rings the changes on romanticism — Byronism, lust, the evils of the Church, the futility of revolution and the baseness of human motives — they are all there. The play is done in renaissance costume. Perhaps surprisingly, it is a great deal of fun. If it is melodrama, it is also good (if not profound) theatre.

Visitors to Stratford this season will enjoy not only the plays, films, and concerts that are regular features of the festival. They can also visit the 20th anniversary exhibition in the Stratford town hall, not to mention the shops, private galleries and tourist attractions that have grown up around the Festival.

Brochures giving play schedules and information on accommodations are available from the Festival Box Office, P.O. Box 520, Stratford. But hurry. With 400,000 anticipated attendances, many performances are already sold out.