

arts

Orchesis '79: colorful and dynamic

Dance review by Michaleen Marte & Lucinda Chodan

The latest Orchesis production needs all the protection it can get.

In fact, Orchesis should get production rights for its *Dance Motif '79*. If a professional company stole one quarter of the material presented this year, they would have a major hit on the contemporary dance scene.

The U of A's dance club surprised its audience with an imaginative, original, and highly versatile production. The show featured a variety of moods and music which kept the crowd enthralled and beguiled.

One of the greatest merits in the production was Orchesis' ability to incorporate its large group successfully into a limited number of pieces.

This was due in part to the clever choreography, which maximized the number of dancers and minimized their obtrusiveness.

The production did not feature large groups only, however. An equal number of pieces showcased only three or four of the more polished dancers in numbers stressing contemporary dance skills.

Unlike many contemporary dance groups, Orchesis's presentation was eminently accessible to the audience. The choreography was skillful but the pieces were unpretentious and varied.

The best dances managed to incorporate tight choreography, original costuming and music, and controlled dancing. Particularly outstanding were *A Gathering Place*, a dynamic, fast-paced number, *Tao: The Way*, sustained and disciplined, with impeccable timing, *Maneige a la Mode*, a light, tight swirling piece, and *Orchy Seuss*, which contained a lovely parody of traditional dance forms by some "sanitation engineers."

Other dances were generally competently performed, although some pieces were marred by lack of timing and precision.

The quality of this year's *Dance Motif* production is a tribute to the devotion of Orchesis members. Outside of the guidance of two Phys Ed department staffers, the group is entirely choreographed, financed, and costumed by its student members.

Orchesis '79: colorful, dynamic and fun.
Don't miss it next year.



Somewhat more than elementary

Murder by Decree
Directed by Bob Clark
Movie Review by Dave Samuel

"Canadian co-production" and syphilis are words which have tended to conjure up equally unpleasant images. *Murder by Decree*, however, marks a sharp departure from the lame performances by washed-up stars and stale imitations of Hollywood productions which have characterized the ghastly co-production tradition.

It's a consistently professional film, which manages to achieve its modest objectives.

In *Murder by Decree* Sherlock Holmes (Christopher Plummer) is set on the trail of Jack the Ripper by radicals masquerading as businessmen. The authorities seem curiously unwilling to ask for Sherlock's help. The murders turn out to be part of an enormous and sinister conspiracy, which taints the whole of the Victorian establishment.

Though the cinematographers have proficiently created an ominously murky London, an underworld where one can imagine the most grotesque and perverse aspects of the Victorian psyche being released, the psychological climate of the movie is actually very contemporary. The conspiracy aspect of the case brings to mind the various Kennedy assassination

theories rather than anything specifically Victorian. The way in which Holmes is caught between equally ruthless right and left wing radicals is also consistent with the contemporary liberal perspective.

The Sherlock Holmes of *Murder by Decree* is a contemporary. The man is manipulated by powerful people, he's prone to guilt and is not above getting involved in violence himself. This new Holmes is removed from the contemplative, rational Holmes literary and cinematic tradition that some of his fans may be disappointed with him.

This disappointment should be substantially assuaged by James Mason's Watson. This is by far the best Watson I've seen, and this characterization is the best done thing in the entire film. Mason's Watson is beautifully stodgy and set in his ways. His discomfort at Holmes' occasionally unconventional whims and leaps of logic is indeed masterful.

Murder by Decree is by no means a perfect picture and it doesn't recreate some aspects of the Victorian period very well. Nevertheless it does succeed as a subtle thriller because it cloaks its evil doers in a way that one always senses their malign influence hanging in the London fog. Like a good detective story, the movie doesn't give itself away until the appropriate point at the end, when Holmes clears away the obscuring mists of the conspiracy.

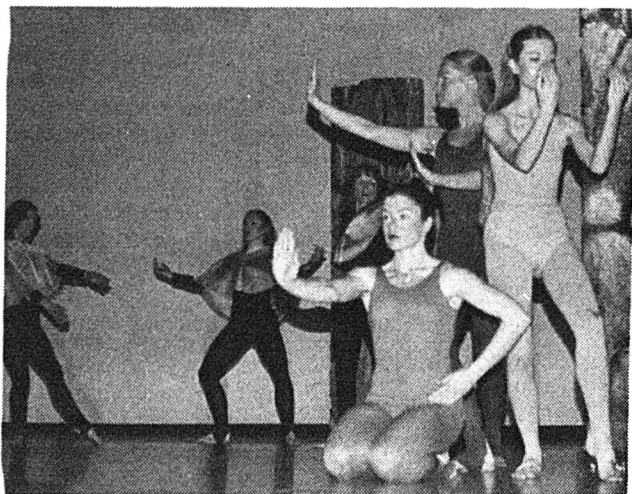


Photo Bob Park

... and flowers never bend with the rainfall

Venus and Mars are alright at Studio Theatre

Review by Gordon Turtle

Studio Theatre's production of *Good News* is one of those shows that I'd love to hate: its posturings, its stale jokes, its complete lack of plot and development, and its built-in triviality should make it instantly worthless.

But it's fun. Working with perhaps the strongest and most consistent troupe of actors this campus has seen in recent years, Studio Theatre could take the worst script imaginable and turn it into an enjoyable production.

The performers in *Good News* are at times exhilarating in their liveliness and proficiency, and their enthusiasm is contagious. Being a musical, *Good News* carries with it the additional requirement of musical talent, but Studio's cast are able to turn this task into a fast-paced display of singing and dancing.

A plot summary of *Good News* is almost impossible: suffice it to say that a threadbare storyline is built around a college football star's need to pass a tough astronomy exam to play in the upcoming championship game. In preparation for the exam, our young hero falls in love with his wallflower tutor, Connie. To keep in tune with the subject, the young lovers nickname themselves Venus (Connie) and Mars

(Tom), and naturally, the play concludes with a big win for Tait College and wedding bells for Venus and Mars.

The runaway star of the show is Marlane O'Brien, whose performance as Connie deserves the highest praise. All of the characters in *Good News* are so flat and unbelievable that the fact that O'Brien can do anything at all with her role is surprising enough. But not only does she bring it some life, she turns it into a chance to display her formidable talents as an actress who seems totally relaxed on stage and appears to have the grace and maturity of a seasoned professional.

The other leading members of the cast are not quite as successful as O'Brien. As Tom, Steven Hilton comes off more as a spiv than a muscle-bound ladies' man, and his ability to stretch the limitations of his role certainly pale beside O'Brien. Brooke Newel (Babe), Judy Buchan (Patricia) and Judith Haynes (Flo) are the women in Tom's life, and though they are uniformly capable in their roles, they never seem to rise above the trivial demands of the script.

Minor standouts are Blair Haynes as Bobby, the anti-hero, and David Lerigny as the freshman Sylvester. Lerigny especially seems a born comic actor and the clumsiness of Sylvester contrasted beautifully

with the grace and fluidity of his dancing.

Generally, *Good News* is a well-directed work, which full credit should go to Thomas Peacock. But ultimately, so what? The strengths of the Studio Theatre group should be tested much more strongly than they are by the script of *Good News*; unlike stronger work, this play places little importance on smoothness of dialogue, subtlety of elocution or efficiency of movement. For many of the characters, *Good News* is merely an opportunity to ham it up, and this is a disappointment. While it is pleasant to see some ultra-light theatre amongst the angst-filled bulk of modern drama, I look to Studio Theatre to provide more than pleasantries. Comedy, even light comedy, need not be totally without lasting themes. Concepts can be explored in good comedy, and to dismiss a comedy as "mere entertainment" is simply making an excuse for a script's weakness.

Good News is fun while it lasts. It provides a brief respite from the actual world and is in itself a "kickin' fun" two and a half hours. But one can only tolerate inane jokes and cliché situations for so long. In a play where falling in love happens as often as going to the beach, my attention span is stretched to its limit, and *Good News* certainly stretches it.