

"Johnny, keep it out of focus. I want to win the foreign picture award."
—Billy Wilder

arts



CORRIDOR KIDS: Former *Excal* photographer Mario Scattoloni is featured in show running until Feb. 15, room 109 Atkinson, Phase I. Described as "a personal view of kids growing up in the Jane-Finch corridor," exhibition is being presented by Calumet Fine Arts Assoc.

Major direction of Schnitzler play focuses on moments before sex

By JASON SHERMAN

The Theatre Department has faced criticism for its selection process, in which some 50 or 60 second-year students audition for a maximum of 16 spots in third year production. But if this year's fourth-year production students are in any way a reflection of the talent that gets through, the selection process is at least vindicated. Last term's *Romeo and Juliet* went far to convey a feeling of unity among the nine students who remain in production.

"We're very much a company," says Erick Trask, who played Romeo. Understandable, considering the 20 hours per week they share in class, the rehearsals and the shows. For Trask, and for Alison Smiley, both of whom will be seen in the upcoming *La Ronde*, York's programme allows for this company feeling without having to resort to the confining and ultimately limiting atmosphere of a conservatory.

"The programme gets more and more structured each year," Smiley says. "And certain members of the department apparently want it to be like a conservatory." Neither of the actors have any tremendous problem with the department moving toward such a programme, but neither would advocate the rigidity and regularity demanded by an institution like the National Theatre School, which involves a process of teaching and learning amounting to little more than classes full of trained automons, says one York teacher. "York emphasizes the ensemble approach," Smiley says.

This is why the choice of Arthur Schnitzler's *La Ronde* is such a paradoxical one. The play is made up of 10 segments, all but one of which are two-character scenes. Each deals with a character from the scene previous either seducing or being seduced, and, again in all cases but one, succeeding. And while Trask hopes for "a transcendence from each scene" so that the duets add up to something slightly more profound, he also says "I can't make up my mind whether it's a series of 'come-fuck-me's', or each scene is trying to present different attitudes, different rhythms. There's a repetitious grind to it."

The play is in "The Round" in many ways. There is a circular structure, so that we both end and begin with a glimpse of a prostitute. But we also are shown a whole range of people from various classes and occupations who hold different values and morals. For Smiley, the idea is that "hypocrisy, game playing and manipulation transcends all barriers of class." And while every scene contains the inevitable "the approach is not to show people humping in bed," Smiley says.

The approach owes a lot to director Leon Major, whose interpretation, says Trask, "centers around the game playing and the enjoyment of the game playing, and the transparency of it. He wants the audience to leave empty."

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Ah, but it isn't as sombre as all that. "We're trying to hit everything that's funny," Trask says. "But we're emphasizing the empty feeling," Smiley says, and these two statements alone demonstrate the opposite tendencies, or complexities, perhaps, of the script.

It's something the actors are very aware of. The characters are both individuals and symbols and, Smiley says, "it was hard at first to get down the posing and the clichés and still make it real, especially since our training here has been in naturalistic drama." The clichés are used to effectively undercut the characters, without making them seem like mere caricatures.

And just to make sure the play isn't reduced to the level of a "mere" farce, "the last scene brings the play down to earth," Smiley says. "It emphasizes isolation."

La Ronde plays Tuesday to Friday in Burton Auditorium. Shows are at 7 p.m., with matinees at 2 Wednesday and Friday.

Medea stilted but not wooden

Medea

by Euripedes
Vanier College Dining Hall
until Saturday

By KEVIN CONNOLLY

Those who venture into Vanier College later this week will be treated to a rather unusual adaptation of Euripedes' tragedy *Medea*, presented under the direction of Fred Thury. This production is visually impressive, largely because of some spectacular masks and costumes by Charles Funnell and Christopher Macloed. In addition the play is performed by actors perched on miniature stilts inspired by the Greek *corthunus*, wooden platform shoes used in classical theatre to make the characters appear larger than life. In ancient Greece these elaborate costumes and headgear were a functional necessity; most drama was viewed outdoors, in large amphitheatres where the distance between the players and most of the audience made masks and the chorus the only workable way of presenting the emotions of the characters.

In the more intimate context of Vanier College, the pageantry is imposing; huge layered costumes, elaborate headpieces, and a stylized set (all sharp angles and oblongs) give events on stage a surreal air that is quite in keeping with the intensity of the play's themes.

Perhaps the most striking thing about this production is its use of the chorus. The play opens with creaking movements and mumbling in the rear, as a chorus of about 10 tattered looking giants advance on the stage through the audience, their murmurs gradually becoming louder, until they are virtually shouting in the audience's ears. One's first reaction is amusement, then nervousness, and finally complete intimidation, the 10 creatures towering over the proscenium, heralding the arrival of Medea.

Medea herself is decked out in splendid fashion in a layered blue silk, the shoulders protruding, her eyes prominent behind a glittering silver mask. The visual attack proceeds immediately as we witness the birth of her two sons, falling in the struggling orange bags from underneath Medea's skirts. As the play continues one is successively startled with the arrival of each new character, each with a unique costume, some entering from the centre aisle on a tall wooden chariot.

The entrances themselves are enough to carry the first half hour, and as we become accustomed to the modernized poetry and the layered delivery of the chorus, we find that much of the play's original power has been preserved, in a simplified form, by Thury's contemporary adaptation. True, there are mo-

Sparse setting, full-bodied puns

Two Gentlemen of Verona

by The Shaker
Atkinson Theatre
until tonight

By MANDA VRANIC

From the sedate music which precedes the performance of the third year workshop production of *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, one expects at the least a sedate performance. Not so. The sparsely furnished set consists of two doorways, several pillars, and a concealed balcony. Scene changes are effected through clever use of images projected on walls to either side of the stage, while the illusion of a forest is created by green lighting and the sound of whining guitar strings.

Particularly during the active, at times acrobatic moments of the play, the space is put to good use. In fact, the production is at its best when it is at its most humorous. Full attention is given to Shakespeare's puns, especially the lewd ones, which are accompanied by explicit gestures, in case the point was lost.

The acting is energetic and never less than competent, although some lines are lost due to an overexuberance for the language, which led to a few false starts. Anna-Marria Hurle and Mark Akler are particularly memorable for their comic turns and sight work. Duncan Ollernshaw gives a credible performance in a difficult bit of characterization as the crusty Duke.

ments when the language breaks down: when Jason tells Medea to get something 'through her thick head', or when, at the close of the play, the chorus jeers at the audience, yelling 'morons' and 'blockheads', but by and large what Thury has done works.

"To do *Medea* today," says Thury, "you either have to do it as a slice of history—which is valid—or contemporize it, make it more accessible to modern audience." Most of what Thury has done merely simplifies the language, providing a greater emphasis on certain thematic aspects of the play which Thury sees as particularly relevant to today's audience.

While there is clearly something unique about Thury's interpretation, one can't help questioning some of his decisions, chiefly the necessity of 'updating' what is clearly established in Euripedes original. *Medea* has a lasting appeal because its themes (love, ambition, self-sacrifice, selfishness, and revenge) are universal, not because it shows a Greek version of feminism or because it can be stretched to include homosexuality. The homosexual suggestion that is played up in the relationship between Jason and Creon could work well (though in the preview, the scene was played poorly), if it weren't cluttered with some extraneous humor that seems to have been forced on the dialogue.



WE'LL DO LUNCH: Fred Thury, director of Vanier's *Medea*.

Similarly, it is easy to see the power struggle between Jason and Medea, as well as the discriminatory nature of their relationship; to bring more attention to it just adds extra weight to what is obvious in the original. No matter how contemporary one tries to make them, Jason is still the hero of the Golden Fleece, Medea is still a sorceress, and the audience will invariably approach the drama on its established mythic terms.

While the close quarters at Vanier contribute heartily to the visual impact of the drama the intimacy cuts both ways. Certain unfortunate technical problems became obtrusive at times, most notably the electric buzzing of the smoke

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