



WILL YOU BE MY VITALINE: Jessica (right, played by Tantoo Cardinal) meets one of four spirits that symbolize her Metis roots, portrayed by Makka Kleist.

Award-winning play *Jessica* examines the Metis' plight

By STAN KLICH

If there is a word to describe Theatre Passe Muraille's production of *Jessica* at The Toronto Free Theatre, spellbinding would come the closest.

Winning Toronto's Dora award for Outstanding New Play and named Best Canadian Production at Quebec's Quinzaine International Theatre Festival, *Jessica* has riveted audiences to their seats with the portrayal of a Metis woman who is caught between the modern world and her traditional Indian culture.

Written by Linda Griffiths in collaboration with Maria Campbell and based on Campbell's autobiographical book *Halfbreed*, the play explores the spiritual world of the main character, Jessica, and the mystical Indian powers that she possesses. Caught between two cultures, Jessica is faced with an inner conflict and as a result there is a battle between the Indian spirits that control her power.

The four spirits, Unicorn, Wolverine, Bear and Crow have been summoned to decide whether Jessica has lost her Indian spiritual powers to the world of the "white man" or whether she should be given one more chance to prove that she is still worthy. Through this setting, the play explores not only the personal fight that Jessica is faced with, but also the oppression of the Indian culture and the injustices imposed upon them.

Graham Greene portrays Jessica's spirit, the Crow. Born in Oshweken on the Six Nations Indian Reserve, Greene describes the conflict within the play. "Jessica's fight is balancing good and evil. Balancing her half white side, balancing her half native side. There's a lot of balances," he said.

Jessica is played by Tantoo Cardinal, a Metis who has been involved with the play since its original pro-

duction four years ago, also commented on Jessica's battle and the cultural struggle she faces. "She is caught between different cultures, different realities. She is caught between what her grandmother and family left her and trying to come back to her own ground."

The acting in *Jessica* is excellent. Using a multi-platformed stage that symbolizes the different levels of reality and spirituality, the actors portray spirits by using masks and then take on dual roles as they descend into the mortal world where they become involved in Jessica's life as both friends and enemies.

The performances by both Cardinal and Greene are strong and convincing. Cardinal gives an emotionally stirring portrayal of the trauma Jessica goes through and, while Greene's portrayal of the Crow doesn't neglect the seriousness of Jessica's battle, his performance adds humour to the play and helps to break the tension.

Combined with the other characters, Cardinal and Greene serve to draw the audience further and further into the conflict as they try to understand what is happening to Jessica.

Speaking about the play, Greene pointed out that there is a lot to be understood and a lot to be discovered in the lines and actions of the characters, Greene explains. "We (himself and the other actors) are still not finished discovering connections and I don't think any one of us will rest until we understand it. "It comes from the heart."

Running until December 7th, *Jessica* is a fantastic, emotionally charged play that will leave few people disappointed. It is a challenge to the mind, leaving many questions to be probed. When asked the best way to understand *Jessica*, Graham Greene offered this good natured answer: "Come see the damn thing and figure it out for yourself."

Nobody will want this silly fool

By SUZANNE LYONS

A fine line separates the realms of the abstract and the absurd. *Nobody's Fool*, starring Rosanna Arquette and Eric Roberts, crosses over this line and drowns in a world of irrationality and perplexity.

Cassie, played by Arquette, is emotionally victimized by a scandalous past that refuses to be forgotten. She is disgraced for stabbing her former boyfriend, Billy, with a fork because he broke their engagement after learning that she was pregnant. Although the incident occurred in the past, Cassie's flashbacks gradually unfold the necessary details to the audiences.

Cassie doesn't seem able to grow up because neither Arquette nor the script will allow her to do so. Throughout the film, she shows girlish emotions, frolicking about in eccentric hats. She also wears dresses that only a child would choose to

wear. Yet how can such an innocent character possess such a limitless capacity for guilt and shame?

But what better place to feel guilty than Cassie's small American hometown called Buckeye Basin. Her mother, Pearl, is bored and indifferent. The concerns of Cassie's brother are limited to the amount of food that is available for consumption.

Cassie is alone until she meets her dashing hero, Riley (Roberts) who is in town designing a set for the summer play festival.

Riley has everything it takes to be a hero: he is handsome, creative, mysterious and above all, he is Cassie's ticket away from her sadness in Buckeye Basin. United by a mutual interest in the theatre, Riley and Cassie form an awkward relationship, for there is little that holds them together aside from the fact that they're both treated like outsiders.

Cassie's turning point occurs during a scene in which she delivers a

soliloquy from Romeo and Juliet. Arquette's performance is strong and well-received, but it is simply not enough to erase the reality of the character's haunting past. Arquette has claimed that, "she (Cassie) goes from A to Z emotionally in her struggle to grow up," but the emotional reconciliation which Arquette speaks of is not effectively conveyed in *Nobody's Fool*. Cassie does not grow up and come to terms with her past, instead she runs away from it.

Written by playwright Beth Henley, perhaps *Nobody's Fool* would have been more appropriate for the theatre rather than the screen. Character development, dialogue and the performances by Arquette and Roberts are serious flaws in the film.

Nobody's Fool simply does not have what it takes to evoke any meaningful responses, unless you happen to be from Buckeye Basin, have recently stabbed your boyfriend with a fork and dress strangely.

Lady Luck shines on *Candide*

By CATHY STURM

Due to an inside tip on a horse running in the Breeder's Cup at 35-1 odds, a student production of *Candide* will be presented at Samuel Beckett Theatre November 25-28.

After proposing their idea of adapting Voltaire's classic for the stage, co-writer's Andrew Clark and David Borenstein learned that funding from the theatre department was not available. For this reason the production budget relied heavily on a winning bet and money donated from the players themselves. The horse came first, the money was collected and the show will now go on.

So as not to eliminate the audience from the enthusiasm of creation, much is being done by Clark and Borenstein to integrate the performers and audience. They hope to allow refreshments to be taken into the theatre, creating the relaxed appeal of a movie theatre where one can slouch back and simply enjoy. With a more relaxed audience the production will face the even greater challenge of capturing the audience's attention. However, Borenstein says, "If we can't get the audience to stop eating, drinking and talking, it is our fault."

Although Voltaire's work is harsh and violent at times and has underlying themes of anti-Semitism, the play focuses on the story as a comical satire. Beyond getting the quick laugh, Borenstein describes the true task as getting the audience to ask itself, "Why am I laughing?"

Andrew Clark, co-writer and director of the production, admits to giving a lot of freedom to the actors and depending on their input and enthusiasm. The readings were often



JUST HANGING OUT: Candide faces certain death at the hands of the Sailor, while the common man just looks on.

experimental, relying on the actor's interpretation of their character.

Even with the actor's participation, Clark's guidance in the production is obvious. An example of this is Clark's idea to "hand out the play, scene by scene, until last Tuesday (two weeks before Curtain)." He felt that keeping the actors in the dark as to the play's outcome would allow them to develop a gradual interpretation of the character's motives. Both writers feel their experiment was successful and that the actors deserve much credit for the final product.

What may stand out in this adaptation of *Candide* is the introduction of a unifying character not in the book. Known to the audience as the common man, the role consists of eight separate characters who act as both commentators and active players in the story. Each time the com-

mon man appears he will be a different character, but he will consistently bring the play's conflicts into focus.

The sets for the play are kept to a minimum as *Candide* travels from country to country. More attention is given to props due to budget limitations. Costuming relies heavily on makeup and the work of make-up artist Chris Pinhey. "Unless you go to high school, and you are a grade nine girl, you won't see that much make-up again," Borenstein said.

It is hoped the heavy make-up will help to reinforce the unrealistic nature of the characters and somewhat alienate the audience in a Brechtian fashion. To both alienate and integrate an audience seems contradictory, but if successful, the play's objective to entertain and make a statement will be self-evident.



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