

My Cousin Rachel Bland Melodrama

by Eric Simpson

The stage adaptation of Daphne du Maurier's popular historical romance, *My Cousin Rachel*, is, if that is conceivable, more melodramatic and stylized than the original novel. This nineteenth century equivalent of the Ledge of Fright has no revelance at all to real life; instead it proffers romances opiate to romance buffs who are hungry for predictable and not too strenuous emotional play-acting.

The Halifax audience ate it up and indeed seemed to be titillated by the whole performance. Gasping and oohing, they were respectfully awed and indignant at the appropriate moments. Amazingly enough the play was probably an excellent example of this genre of artistic endeavour. Certainly not a great deal of acting skill is needed, an occasional injection of incredulity plus a dash of intrigue will suffice. The trick is that the actors must appear bound up in their roles while maintaining all the time a certain distance so as not to unduly disturb the audience... after all it's not really serious so the characters mustn't be too believable.

However unfortunately the actors are not only unbeliev-

able but utterly transparent and lacking in conviction. They imbued the entire play with a sense of the absurd. But we mustn't lose sight of the desired effect: to allow the febrile contemporary mind to fly unfettered from the mundane affairs of this world to the more rarefied air of times past. If the play grants a brief respite from daily drudgeries who are we to demand a profound insight into existence or good acting?

Another ingredient that guaranteed the success of *My Cousin Rachel* was its inauthentic set. The walls of the supposedly rich manor house was poorly painted and the furniture was tacky. The play's strict adherence to questions of money, sex and intrigue was undoubtedly a great asset also.

As for the acting, it was so poor at times that it ceased to be even one-dimensional—it simply didn't exist. Linette Donald as Louise Kendall was so jejune and supercilious that she was reminiscent of Maggie Muggins with a British accent. She has played the Washer Woman in *Toad of Toad Hall*, and she undoubtedly would excell in children's plays, but she was out of place in a romantic drama. McDon-

ald Hubley played a tired and uninteresting Uncle Nick; he is an 'old world' hack who seems made-to-order for a role in "No Sex Please—We're British". Ernst Bale as the faithful retainer Seecombe was excellent at hobbling, shuffling and mumbling. His was the only performance that rose to the level of ordinary. The star spangled headliner—Patricia Phoenix—was gloriously phenomenal in her velvet gowns but she gave a rather flat performance. Despite her undeniable stage presence and poise Phoenix never really spread her wings. Her voice was strained and she did not appear overly nefarious or stunning. She did effectively mesmerize Phillip (Donald MacIvor) but he was so nery and moody that he needed some calming down. Ernst Walder did portray a very Italian gentleman however his part was so small it did not help the play much.

An impromptu apology by Patricia Phoenix at the end of the performance in which she referred to a hectic schedule, was touching but unsatisfactory.

It seems the Newfoundland government could spend their money more wisely than this. Their Cultural Affairs division



Patricia Phoenix, star of *My Cousin Rachel*.

would do better to finance local artists rather than importing such tepid fare.

For those with an appetite for bland affairs this production was just the cuppa tea. However my only consolation was what happened to Rachel

on the bridge at the conclusion of the play (It was a long drop.)

Now if she had only been performing in one of her more famous plays like *Jack the Ripper* or *the Blood of the Vampire*.

Oratio at Dal

Dalhousie Cultural Activities and the Dalhousie Department of Music have announced that due to circumstances beyond their control there will be one performance only of the much heralded oratorio, *A Child of Our Time*. The massive work will be presented Saturday, March 31 at 8:30 p.m., in the Rebecca Cohn Auditorium of the Dalhousie Arts Centre.

The one hundred voice Dalhousie Chorale under the direction of Dr. Walter Kemp will combine with four top professional soloists and an orchestra to present the work. The soloists are soprano Sheila Brand, contralto, Ruth Ann Archibald, tenor, John Keane and Alvin Reimer, bass.

A Child of Our Time is one of the most significant musical works coming out of the second World War experience, according to Dr. Kemp. The oratorio deals with the search for moral and spiritual truth expressed in musical terms and highlighted by arrangements of black spirituals.

The composer of *A Child of Our Time*, Sir Michael Tippett, is acknowledged as Britain's leading composer. His operas, symphonies and oratorios are performed the world over and have proven to be immensely popular. *A Child of Our Time* is a typical Tippett statement expressing his personal philosophy of the human condition through his music.

Permanent Wave

(ZNS-CUP)—The Trade publication *Cashbox* reports that many progressive rock stations are beginning to accept new wave rock-and-roll after an initial resistance to that type of music.

One New York Station, W.P.I.X. F.M., has instituted a format it calls "Elvis to Elvis," which incorporates the best of new wave and established rock artists.

Program director Joe Piasek told *Cashbox* "right now there happens to be a sizeable chunk of the new wave music that makes good rock and roll."

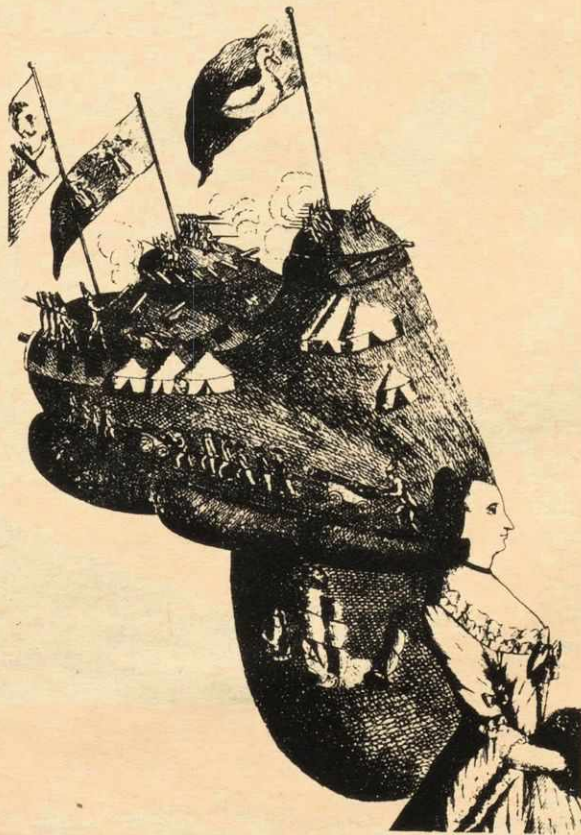
Recent recordings of Elvis

Costello, the Clash, Blondie, Talking Heads, the Cars and Police have been cited by some programmers as being a new wave music that has mass appeal.

One programmer said that radio's initial resistance to new wave was caused in part by the Sex Pistols and their outrageous conduct. Most programmers contacted by *Cashbox*, however, agreed that recent recordings by superstars have become "boring" and "the same old thing".

The programmers see new wave music as a fresh departure from so-called mainstream rock.

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