

Hair vital and polished, but it's a lie

By JIM PURDY

Hair is a musical comedy selling the hippie culture to the middle class establishment. Centering on a New York tribe of youths, it is a collage of quickly-paced skits and musical numbers that run the full gamut of subject matter from the Vietnam war to racism, drugs and blatant, vulgar sexuality.

There is no linear plot or conventional characterization, but a series of irreverent songs and gags that are sometimes touching, usually comic and always obvious.

It is a highly infectious production because the people in it are the youth which the musical is portraying. As authors Rado and Ragni claim, the cast members are not acting but "being"; they are not confined to the strict, alien personalities created for them by the author but are free to indulge in their own personalities, to impetuously behave as themselves.

With their own energy not stifled by the demands of a formal script, the cast revels in its own dynamism creating a volatile spirit and spontaneity which explodes throughout the theatre and captures the audience in an atmosphere of high key excitement.

This emotional involvement and audience participation is striven for throughout the performance, with cast members bounding, crawling and swinging through the audience, down the aisles and through a network of ladders and scaffolds to the balconies.

But the involvement is superficial, for despite the excitement generated by the cast, the audience remains isolated from the action onstage. When Kid Carson as Berger, wearing what is a cross between bikini underwear and a jock strap, bounds into the audience, straddles a female spectator so that his crotch stares her in the face, and waves his shaggy hair in front of her, she simply sits there smiling vacuously.

There is no reaction; she neither slaps him nor embraces him, rejects or accepts him, but remains a paying audience member separate from the activity of the paid actor.

This is what makes "Hair" safe for the middle class audiences that pay to see it, for they remain alien viewers of a series of farcial skits that stereotype youth and mould it into an oversimplified version. Despite the anti-social subject matter, the activity is merely laughed at, applauded and dismissed as good-natured entertainment.

The audience remains an audience enjoying a musical comedy, and not individuals being confronted with real social issues. The cast can scream "fuck" in all its grammatical forms at the top of their voices for five minutes, but it matters little to the audience for the onslaught is not directed straight at them but only at the abstract fucked-up world.

The audience is not being personally confronted as the case would be if a spectator were asked: "Hey fuckhead,



Hair: selling 'safe' hippie culture to the middle class establishment.

how much did your fucking pantsuit cost? I guess you think you're hot shit in it." This would prompt a reaction, probably defensive, which would involve the viewer in the action, debate, fight or whatever form the conflict might take. He would no longer be able to sit back and be entertained by a 'tribal rock musical' that is nothing more than a hip Sound of Music.

Part of Hair's charm is the content of revolution in which the viewer can indulge, satisfying his limp concept of radicalism before returning unruffled to the establishment of which he is a part. Paul Hellyer, Robert Nixon, ad executives and matrons can all groove on Hair and its middle class version of youth, righteously exclaiming that "Toronto is ready for Hair". Actually, Hair is ready for Toronto, for it is safe and acceptable to the middle class conventions, even while rebelling against those conventions.

It is the classic cop-out in which revolution is inobtrusively absorbed into the establishment where it is simply marketed as another consumer product which gives only the illusion of rebellion.

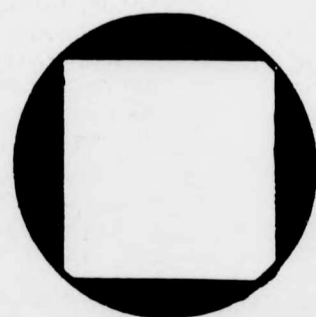
Its millionaire producers get even richer and the mass media help market it with magazines ranging from Saturday Evening Post to Playboy and with television program and records all selling Hair as revolutionary. But in the end, its anti-materialist message rings hollow when one must pay such exorbitant prices to hear it, while the obvious gags remove any subtlety and dimensionality from the social message, making it harmless, and its innocuous music is really more conventional than rock.

Certainly it is entertaining, but despite its production values, its onstage exuberance and youthful vitality, Hair is a lie.

SALE

**1000 Deutsche Grammophon
500 RCA, Impulse!,
Command, Polydor, etc.**

Deutsche Grammophon at \$3.00 off — first time ever!
Jazz, Pop, Folk at \$1.00 to \$2.69 off — some rare buys!
(and watch for our February Book Sale next week!—)



**YORK
UNIVERSITY
BOOKSTORES**