

ARTS

Easy choice between "communism" and "strictness"

Third World Film Festival
March 6, 7

review by Greg Harris

Robert C. North, distinguished Stanford University Political Scientist, recently delivered a series of lectures at the U of A on the future possibilities for the global community — it was a bleak forecast.

There is going to be a whole lot of shit hitting the fan, he seemed to say, unless some sort of equitable system of global resource allocation is developed.

North's argument is disturbingly simple. As the world's population mushrooms, resources will be gobbled up with the same exponential speed; in the same fashion, the increasing sophistication of technology will more and more become a force competing for its piece of the finite pie of world resources. (It takes more resources to build a Cuisinart than a knife, for example.) Therefore, today's already frantic scramble for mother earth's limited bounty will escalate and intensify. Heated competition will boil over into conflict and ultimately degenerate into violence.

And violence is the nasty part of the

scenario which can assume various dimensions of terror. The recent Third World Film Festival documented nightmares ranging from the quiet terror of malnutrition to the headsplitting terror of unprovoked torture.

With, without, as Pink Floyd sings, is undeniably what the fighting's all about whether it's at the international level of North's theory, or the playground-sandbox level of the child psychologist's theory. Never mind the narrow ideologies that inspire politicians to simple-minded, cloud-creating rhetoric.

The 1980 film *El Salvador: Revolution or Death* is an excellent documentation of not only naked terror, but the embarrassingly naked rhetoric that unfortunately deceives some to an allegiance to terror. The film opens with a portly member of the ruling military junta confiding to the press in Haig-like terms that communism threatens the freedom of El Salvador. As the film progresses it becomes evident that the gentleman uses his own definitions for certain words.

"Freedom" seems to apply only to the fourteen landowning families, multinational corporations, and the present

beseiged government. "Communism" seems to mean peasants organizing into trade unions, and revolting to obtain things like food, health living conditions, and a true democracy.

Later in the film Defense Minister Garcia makes the gracious statement, "We want to be strict but not repressive." The senses churn and the stomach reels with the endless footage of government-manufactured carnage. Firing on demonstrators, it appears, is only "strict." Just as kidnapping is only "strict." And daily torture is only strict. Could it possibly be that the intentions of armchair rhetoricians Duarte, Garcia, Haig and Reagan are something less than noble?

The reliability of the film's producers? Well, it was funded by the World Council of Churches. Communists.

The politics of need and greed and ideologies of terror and error were explored in other films, but not as incisively as in *Revolution or Death*. *Controlling Interest* concluded that capitalism is the evil of mankind since it exploits people. Indeed, the rape of land and culture, carried out by multinationals supported by western bankers and government policy-makers, is

absolutely unjustifiable for anyone with even the crudest notions of justice. But as Andersen mentioned last week, the people make up the system and failure to recognize it only ducks the buck.

Maybe at some point in the future we'll see a purely non-ideological short feature based on Harlan Ellison's speculative fiction short story, "The Childrens Hour." Thousands of children flood the United Nations General Assembly one day to protest numerous war threats being bandied about by the "adult" UN reps. One child acts as spokesperson:

We want you to stop fighting. We are scared, and we have waited and waited, but no one will do anything. If you knew how you scare us all the time with your fighting you wouldn't do it. But you do, and we are here to tell you, if you don't stop right now, right away, we are leaving...

On that day they left.

Where, we do not know. But they made good their warning. We played the Pied Piper, and we played the wrong tune.

We have no children, and we miss them, but we haven't too much time to worry about it now. After all, there is a war on.

A play quite as awful as anything by Bob and Doug

Nurse Jane Goes To Hawaii
Citadel Rice Theatre

review by I. and J. Levental

For their first assignment, students of playwriting are often given a set of wildly different and kooky characters, then told to put them all together in a play. The result can often be original and funny, but not likely capable of anything more than a thirty-minute treatment. Ask anyone who's ever taken Drama 360 (first year playwriting).

What would you do if your prof asked you to shove together:

1. a dermatologist with a penchant for pantyhose
2. a naive university student searching for his biological parents
3. a pulp romance writer who, at the age of 33, is desperately seeking to be deflowered, and has a fetish for ceramics
4. a timid geography teacher
5. a self-assured and rather domineering

female advice columnist

6. an obnoxious cub-reporter

7. a pulp romance editor who looks like Craig Russel in drag, hates kids, and plays a wicked game of bridge.

Perhaps you could dream up a cute little sketch a la Carol Burnett, but would you expect a paying audience to sit through a full two acts of the stuff?

For a test of true endurance, we suggest you go have a look at *Nurse Jane Goes to Hawaii*, currently playing at the Rice Theatre. This peurile situation comedy, by Canadian playwright Allan Stratton, goes from mediocre to bad to intolerable as the gimmicks are quickly worn away, only to be replaced by idiotic gags and pratfalls.

The first act starts with Edgar the geography teacher (Larry Aubrey) bringing the nubile and effervescent pulp romance author (Kate Lynch) home to his place for the weekend. Vivien, the author, is eager to cast off that dreaded scourge, virginity. At the age of 33, in 1982, this has

got to be the least believable aspect of the play.

Edgar thinks that his wife Doris, the syndicated advice columnist (Judith Mabey), is away at a conference in Saskatchewan. Little does he know, she is right there in the house, having changed her travel plans at the last moment. Vivien quickly changes into her skimpy baby-doll pajamas. What's wrong with a little T. and A. among consenting adults, anyway? Thus begins the first of a series of hide-and-seek games as Edgar tries to conceal his little indiscretion from Doris.

Inspired by Edgar's ceramic figurines scattered about the living room, Vivien conjures up a tale of romantic intrigue in the South Pacific. She begins to dictate her new novel, *Nurse Jane Goes to Hawaii*, into a portable mini-cassette recorder. This on-going narrative provides the only original and funny comic device of the play. It adds a sense of continuity and development which is otherwise sorely lacking.

As the other characters make their entrance, the plot becomes convoluted and dumb. But comic entanglements and complications do not have to be so stupid. In Neil Simon's *California Suite*, for example, the "dramatis personae" were recognizable, "real" people; that's what made the situation so much more credible and the comedy genuinely funny.

In *Nurse Jane*, however, we are stuck with a bunch of theatrical caricatures as devoid of human qualities as any you will find on the worst second-rate American TV sit-coms. The entire second act consists of tired, time-worn over-played gags and schticks. How BORING! While the first act has its funny moments, the second act is dreadful. It milks to death all the stunts one

might find in an all-purpose gag writing manual for the uninitiated: drinks-splashed-in-the-face, cakes-pushed-in-the-face, doors-slammed-in-the-face, etc. This is the act, though, when Stratton finally resolves his original problem of shoving all these diverse people into one comedic melting pot.

Needless to say, a play of this sort demands a high degree of ingenuity on the part of the actors to make it easier to digest. The few big bursts of laughter which were elicited out of an otherwise subdued audience can be attributed to a couple of fine performances, not the script.

Kate Lynch was particularly delightful. A comedienne of considerable skill and range, she deserves better than this script can give her. Larry Aubrey also made us laugh, especially when he awkwardly tried to join Ms. Lynch in her song and dance routine in the first act. Judith Mabey gave a stable, well-balanced performance, in contrast to Terrence La Brosse and Patricia Gage who played the dermatologist and his wife. Both, armed with supposedly funny paraphernalia - be that pantyhose on the head or cake in the face, miserably failed to make themselves entertaining.

Alan Stinchbury designed the tasteful, promising set. Timothy Bond directed with vigor - slightly too much vigor, in fact. Neither of these individuals, try as they might, could save the play. Not to worry. *Nurse Jane* is currently enjoying highly successful runs across Canada. The same nation that has elevated two cretins, Bob and Doug McKenzie, to the stature of national heroes and international stars, will see to it that *Nurse Jane* will be hailed as the Great Comedy of the Great White North.

Film doesn't cut mustard

The Amateur
Rialto 1 & Meadowlark

review by Geoffrey Jackson

I enjoy a good spy flick with lots of skull-duggery, double-crossing and suspense. *The Amateur* promises such delights but, alas, is unable to deliver. It is difficult to say why, since all the basic ingredients for a good thriller are here.

We have a clever, handsome hero played in a competent fashion by John Savage. This hero is set upon a mission of revenge against some thoroughly nasty terrorists. He goes through all sorts of adventures, gets a girlfriend, and solves mysteries while going from one close call to another. This would seem to be classic cold war stuff. Yet somehow the film never really gets you to the edge of your seat, never mind riveting you there.

The first 11 minutes are shocking, a

real cracker attack on a U.S. embassy. But after this promising start things begin to go downhill. I think the most important reason for this decline lies in the poor handling of the villains in this film. The nasty terrorists, are sadly underused. They seem to sit around waiting for the hero to come and kill them. It's hard to believe that professional killers could be so lacking in initiative.

Instead of using these evil terrorists as a foil to the hero, the director, Charles Jarrot, gives us a clever spychief as played by Christopher Plummer. Plummer plays this mastermind of Czech intelligence like a dusty old professor. I suppose he was intended to be a classy "good-hearted" villain but he just doesn't work. While the hero is scrambling around Czechoslovakia we get to watch Plummer being confused and befuddled by events. Its as if Mr. Chips had wandered onto the set of a James Bond movie.

So the film loses us. The bad guys sit around like so many shooting gallery ducks, waiting to be shot. The hero displays some nice ingenuity, but after a generation or so of Bond's pyrotechnics I doubt that anyone will be that amazed. The end of the film, billed as 11 minutes to rivet you to your seat, is a sadly-done cliché. The sort of shoot out you'd expect on Hawaii Five-O.

This film is a Canadian production and a very professional-looking one at that. Unfortunately it is also a poorly made B-movie. I think that the next time Jarrot wants to make a thriller he should spend a month or so looking very carefully at some films of Hitchcock's or DePalma's. Those two men made films that really could "rivet" an audience to its seats; this film merely kills a couple of hours in a painless fashion.

Up and Coming

MUSIC

Pied Pear: Provincial Museum Theatre; Fri. March 19, 8:00 p.m.; tickets at Mike's, SU Box Office.

A charming folk duo, as anyone who attended the Folk Festival last year will testify. Somewhat nutty too.

THEATRE

Balconville; Corbett Hall; March 18 to 27; 8 p.m.; tickets at 3-146 Fine Arts Centre.

This joint production of Workshop West and the University's Studio Theatre deals with French-English conflict, romance, and political corruption in the tenements of Montreal's Point St. Charles. Winner of the 1978 Chalmer's Award for Outstanding Canadian Play.

READINGS AND SPEAKERS

Ray Smith, Humanities AV L-3; Thursday March 18; 12:30 p.m.; admission free.

Smith is the author of *Cape Breton is the Thought Control Centre of Canada*, and has produced "the most accomplished fantasist writing in Canada today" according to the *Montreal Gazette*.

Last chance for writers

Only three more scribbling days left until the deadline for the *Gateway Literary Supplement*. After 5:00 p.m. Friday we will accept no more short stories, poems, essays or illustrations, even if they are so stupendous they make Shelley's "Ozymandias" look like "Mary Had a Little Lamb." So make sure you get your contribution up to our offices on time.

IN MEMORIAM

A special evening of readings and music in memory of the late Miriam Mandel will be held March 23, 8:00 p.m. at Graphica Gallery, 10357-82 Avenue. In attendance will be fellow writers, poets, publishers and booksellers. Everyone is welcome to attend.

George Melnyk of NeWest Press, says, "The sudden death of Edmonton poet Miriam Mandel last month was a major loss to the city's literary community. The author of three books of poetry and the winner of a Governor-General's Award in 1973, Miriam Mandel was a significant figure in Edmonton's writing community."

For further information, contact Mr. Melnyk at 426-6382