

A new mounting of Brecht's classic play *Good Person of Szechuan* has new life breathed into it by Damir Andrei and York theatre students

by Harry Rudolfs

In an innovative and comedic production of Bertolt Brecht's *Good Person of Szechuan*, Director Damir Andrei has managed to breathe new life into the classic.

Brecht wrote *Good Person* in the 1930's, perhaps partly because of his fascination with Chinese epic theatre. It ranks as one of his more obscure works.

The plot deals with the schism between goodness and corruption. The protagonist, Shen Te, a poor but kind-hearted prostitute, takes in three gods who have come to earth searching for a "good person". Because Shen Te showed compassion to the gods when all the respectable citizens refused them lodging, they make her a gift of a thousand dollars.

Shen Te buys a tobacco shop and endeavours to do good for others, but is very soon exploited by freeloaders. In difficult circumstances, Shen Te is forced to impersonate an imaginary male cousin, Shui Ta. This persona enables her to deal with her financial difficulties, but at the same time her kindness is turned to greed. The situation is further complicated when Shen Te falls in love with a manipulative pilot who uses her affection to try to buy himself a job.

theatre
Good Person of Szechuan
written by Bertolt Brecht
directed by Damir Andrei
York Studio Theatre
until November 9

Brecht portrays a society which is riddled with corruption, where even the lowly, but sage water seller, Wang, who provides a conscience to the viewer, uses a skewed measure. The dichotomy eventually unravels the story. The moral, "the useful are soon used up," is at one point, flashed overhead.

Kato Charles turns in a credible and convincing performance in the dual role of Shen Te/Shui Ta. Paul Nunes, as Wang, contributes the major stimulus to the burlesque atmosphere which counters the serious theme. Indeed, the laughs flow easier as the lengthy play progresses — although the humour gets slightly overblown when the three gods put on sunglasses and ride off on the back of an imaginary motorcycle to a Jimi Hendrix tune.

On the whole, the production is well-paced. Just as it starts to slide towards tedium, the mood is shifted by some interesting technique. The mime sequence of tobacco cutting

and sorting machines is almost magical and transfixing. Stage hands and props are used dynamically to create an underlying tension.

The clever use of set design and a bare minimum of props helps to maintain the audience's oblique detachment. Stage hands carry doors and wall panels; at one point, screens are lowered from the ceiling to create a constricting atmosphere. The continuity of the three hour play is enhanced by a fresh, exciting music score composed and performed by Andrew Craig.

This ambitious and difficult project is acquitted well by an enthusiastic cast — most of them playing two roles. It's interesting to see cigarettes smoked on stage, as the setting is a tobacco shop. It's also obvious that many of the actors didn't know how to smoke — something that would have been unheard of a few years ago.

Brecht would have probably liked this keen mixture of the bizarre and the mundane, the gripping and the ambiguous, but he probably wouldn't have been able to sit in the audience without lighting up a stogie. This seems like an ideal vehicle to get funding from our hard-pressed tobacco industry.

Good Person of Szechuan is at the York Studio Theatre until November 9.



excite november 6, 1991

A little colour for a grey campus

by Moira McDonald

Outside the Student Centre Art Gallery, the fall colours turned monotone brown. Inside were the more vibrant tones of last week's exhibit, *Collectively...Six: Works 1991*.

Collectively..., which ran from Oct. 23 to Nov. 1, featured the work of six undergraduate artists. Their subjects varied, but all featured an intelligent, often exciting use of colour.

Photographic vision was the theme of five works by Frank Danielson, which examined the effect of light through form and colour. "Click, Click, Click, Click" and "Standings" were the most dynamic in this regard, making light tangible. Danielson also made eloquent use of colour to depict the interplay of light and texture in "Window-Positive."

Where Danielson made light tangible, Rob Moreau used tones of brown and red to let the viewer see — and even hear — space. Moreau's space was like an atomic wind — bleak and soundless.

In "Spaces," human figures were encapsulated in moving spheres in a flight pattern without a destination, from which they could not escape. There was a sense of the figure's vain struggle to break out of their spheres and communicate with one another.

Kate Buckeridge's works made the strongest dramatic statement, with their eerie, David Lynchian quality. In "Solomon's Den," a seemingly innocent, pink Victorian chair became sinister by being placed in a downward slanting and contracting room.

"House of Parliament" was a

gallery
Collectively...Six: Works 1991
various artists
Student Centre Art Gallery

tirical and ambiguous. A Mulroney chin attached to a body clad in a clover-leaf patterned suit seemed to walk off contentedly from a poker game. But the identity of the couple left behind, bearing down on one another with triangular knives, was unclear. Were they MPs left to vain argument or the average Canadian couple left to battle out the recession alone?

Red figured prominently in two works by Doris Sung. "That Night of the Day" was a beautiful piece, set during a Chinese wedding. Red and gold made fiery sweeps and swirls across and behind a hall floor, a testimony to the vigour of cultural traditions.

Sung made a statement by only painting on the face of the seated bride — her sister — who brimmed with pride. The faces of the guests and the groom were featureless; the day and night were hers, but tomorrow...?

Shelly Bahl and David Oliver's paintings worked with few objects, imbuing them with strength. Bahl's "In Time and Space" made a pair of shoes into a monolith. This was one painting that wouldn't let the viewer get too close. A fluttering scarf lent false delicacy to the scene.

Oliver's "Untitled" was a teaser. A big fat green apple stood stubbornly while an icy blue fork approached from the left top corner. I liked the

idea, but would have liked to see how the two objects would look in a more violent confrontation, with the apple shining as much as the fork.

Hills director had an idea, didn't execute

by Colleen Sweeney

Blue Pigeon Productions performed *Hills Like White Elephants* in late October. It was an original collective piece written, adapted and directed by York student Armen Kazazian. He appears to have had an idea of what his piece should offer his audience; unfortunately, his idea was not executed well.

Three couples in separate situations were seated in a restaurant with a beautiful view of hills that look like white elephants. Two students incessantly worried, a woman and a man failed to communicate and two aspiring actresses fought. *Hills Like White Elephants* was play about people with secrets and hidden problems.

Kazazian blended three scenes into one play. Two were adaptations: one from Ernest Hemingway's *Hills Like White Elephants*, the other from August Strindberg's *The Stronger*. The two adaptations were direct and simple, yet engrossing.

The third scene, written by Kazazian, was the weakest. He wanted to say too much; by making it complex, he failed to complement the other two scenes. The scene was not as cohesive as Strindberg and Hemingway, resulting in an imbalance.

Was Kazazian's original scene necessary for the play to succeed? Perhaps he should have adapted another scene from an equally esteemed author or playwright in order to maintain some sort of equilibrium. If his aim is to write an original work, he should direct a play solely written by himself. Mixing his writing with works by classical writers invites a comparison.

theatre
Hills Like White Elephants
written and directed by Armen Kazazian
Samuel Beckett Theatre
October 22 to 26

An additional weakness was that the quality of acting in the Kazazian sketch was not as strong as in the two adopted sketches. Tracey Shaeffer, who played the woman in Hemingway's scene, was at times quite an enticing performer. Ian Kelly, who played Jim in Kazazian's scene, failed to convince the audience that he was really laughing. This poorer acting exposed his original piece to more scrutiny.

The set seemed inappropriate. Lyrical music on a classical guitar filtered into the space before the show opened. Combined with the cactus

plants on the tables, this suggested the play was located in Mexico. It was confusing to find that the plays were actually set in Europe.

Kazazian challenged himself with a brilliant conception. The Hemingway and Strindberg scenes were well chosen; but the original sketch needed refining and recasting. There was a lack of focus in the scripts; as a writer and director, Kazazian needed to make a decision on how to strengthen the structure of his texts.

In addition, there was a need to better manage the three scenes simultaneously; Kazazian should have had no fear in overlapping dialogue between the different sketches. It was unfortunate that the presentation wasn't as good as Kazazian's original ideas promised.

Art sale and South American aid

by Andrew Brouse

Social conditions have deteriorated significantly in Nicaragua since the US-sponsored Chamorro government took power from the revolutionary Sandinistas in 1989, making the need for financial and moral support to the opposition and resistance more important than ever.

This year marks the tenth anniversary of the Aid to the Arts of Nicaragua benefit show and sale which was initiated by York visual arts profs George Manupelli and Eugene Tellez. All profits from sales will go to Nicaraguan and Guatemalan resistance and education.

Works by upcoming as well as internationally acclaimed artists, including York faculty, students and others, are being exhibited. All artwork is for sale at bargain prices in order to raise money to buy art supplies and other goods for schools in Nicaragua. There is also a Guatemalan relief table with many handcrafted goods, objects and even food for sale to raise funds for Guatemalan resistance.

The show runs until November 8 in the IDA Gallery, Fine Arts Phase II. An opening celebration is slated for Thursday, November 7 at about 6 pm.

Drop by and see some excellent art, buy a work or two at discount prices and show some solidarity for the oppressed of South America.

arts

index

- ▶ Pretty good bands...14
- ▶ Record review smorgasboard...16
- ▶ Year of the Gun misses target...18