



Hamlet makes an amazing musical

The "hip Hamlet" is a three-hour song and dance tour de force which can sock the breath out of the most dubious viewer.

This version of Hamlet, performed at the Bathurst Street United Church by the Trog theatre troupe over two years ago and filmed by director-editor Rene Bonniere and cameraman Richard Leiterman, offers a Hamlet in jeans, a Polonius who acts as chorus and carnival barker, and a corporate ghost composed of five crawling, dying, moaning performers. Even Ophelia and Hamlet come in pairs.

But anyone who shies away from the mere thought of such an experiment reckons without the prodigious staging talent of Trog's Steven Bush, who also plays Polonius, and the amazingly versatile acting powers of the Trog members themselves. Perhaps the film can best be summed up as a Shakesperian Marat/Sade, in the improvisational vein of Jesus Christ Superstar.

Almost everything works, from subtitled musical numbers to a vibrant interpretation of the classic Hamlet speeches ("to be or not to be" recited like a Gregorian chant.) The only flaws are a few garbled speeches and an overly long break in the action shortly before the finale; but these may be re-edited.

Producer Budge Crawley is having trouble distributing the film because of its length; but if it makes it to a theatre downtown, or back to York (it played here Feb. 14), it's worth the effort to catch it.

Theatre students build Balcony with flashing lights and talent

By WARREN CLEMENTS

The programme booklet bulged with names of third and fourth-year York theatre students who had sacrificed weeks of leisure time to sew costumes, build props and rehearse lines.

And when the tin-foil curtain opened February 12 on the theatre department's annual project, Jean Genet's *The Balcony*, the weeks of preparation paid off with a smooth-running show with split-second scene changes and an atmosphere of self-confidence.

Not that it didn't have minor problems. The two professionals in the cast, Norman Welsh as the bishop with his Alastair Sim mannerisms, and David Calderisi as a Groucho Marx chief of police, injected lively slices of ham into their performances which tended to show up the rather one-note line-reading of the rest of the cast.

But to dwell on that point would be to miss the point of the exercise, which was to give the students a practical stage for their acting talents. And those talents, while essentially unrefined, took *The Balcony* by the horns and shook from it moments of humour, despair and fantasy, and a highly involving and entertaining evening.

ROLE-PLAYING

Genet's *Balcony* is an allegory about

role-playing in society, and the extent to which all of us play at least one role, if not many, in our attempt to belong to that society. The vehicle for the allegory is a whorehouse, where non-descript individuals can play the roles of bishops, generals and judges with highly trained whores, and enjoy the superior status which, for lack of charisma, ambition and fortune, they have never achieved.

"People need illusions to survive in our world," *Balcony* director Kurt Reis, a professional known for his work at the St. Lawrence Centre, wrote in the programme notes. "Theatre is an illusion; love is an illusion; sex is an illusion."

"But also revolution and social 'improvements' are illusions. Indeed, the search or hope for any reality is in itself an illusion."

A heavy message like that might drag any play down into boredom and talk, but the energy of the actors and the brevity of the individual sequences maintained a momentum which made the show, almost three hours long, pass without a yawn.

EXCELLENT BUDD

Outstanding in a competent cast was Barbara Budd as Irma, the manageress of the whorehouse, and, in some respects, proprietor of fantasy and reality. As the leading character,


she held the stage for most of the evening and had to deal with lovers, past lovers, employees and patrons of the whorehouse. Throughout, whether dealing with a prostitute who feels like more than just a "whore", lambasting her ineffective pimp or assuming the role of queen, Budd handled her character with an underlying resolve which made all her transformations and actions credible.

While initially a bit arch, her manner loosened as the evening progressed, until she acquired full command of the character's emotions; one sensed at the play's conclusion that Irma would always be waiting in the next room, supplying pawns against whom the insecure could balance their desired roles.

BLUE LIGHTS

The most imaginative touch of the production, presumably engineered by lighting person Nancy Boake, was a flashing blue strobe light which flickered wildly between scenes, stopping only when the action was ready to continue. If one shielded one's eyes from the blinding light, one could make out the actors, in Charlie Chaplin-like fashion, trotting the props off and onto the Atkinson Studio stage.

An intriguing device, in an evening of many intriguing devices.



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