

# Commedia slapstick

**To Be a Servant or a Master**  
Nebulous Rebels  
March 3-6

review by Trevor Buckle

The audience was transported back in time to the sixteenth century with the Nebulous Rebels' production of *To Be a Servant or a Master*, as directed by Daviu Cassel. This production certainly kept the crowd's attention with ease because it had it all: song, dance, juggling, acrobatics, love, sexual innuendo, and, of course, a sword fight.

*To Be a Servant or a Master* was produced in the style of the commedia dell'arte, in which clownish impersonations of stereotypical characters were thrown together in bawdy, slapstick comedies with ridiculous but amusing plots. This production itself started off with a bang by having the actors come out and essentially warm us up and get us into the spirit of things. By doing this, they not only introduced the whole idea of the slapstick, but also grabbed our attention with music, dance, juggling, and even a human pyramid. The key word here is versatility.

The plot itself was a twisting, complicated affair. Pandolino and the fair Orilla were hopelessly in love. However, unbeknownst to them, Orilla's father, the miserly Il Dotore, had contracted her in marriage to Pandolino's decrepit and equally miserly father, Pantalone, and with an impressive dowry thrown in as well. However, the romantic rascal Arlechino overheard the fathers... understandably, much chaos ensued.

The acting itself was a treat. Much credit must be given to the actors themselves, because although they had a set script, there was no script, and the actors had to rely solely on their improvisational skills.

Binaifer Kapadia as the fluttery Orilla was dippy, ditty, and very sweet. Similarly, Stephen Humphrey, as her ardent lover Pandolino, was touching and very funny, and together the two produced some great scenes, including their first meeting.

David Cassel created an Arlechino who looked like he was on L.S.D. He was incredibly

energetic and exuberant, but at times I felt he was pushing the whole clown idea a bit too far. However, Cassel must be given credit for having talent: he is the only person I have

**The Dead**  
Vestron Pictures  
Westmount 4

review by Elaine Ostry

John Huston's film *The Dead*, based on the James Joyce story of the same name, has that quality so rare in modern movies: grace.

This is not a movie that will thrill you. It has none of the slapstick comedy nor suspense/action of most films. But it has subtlety and refinement of character, plot, speech and cinematography that lends the film a haunting power over the audience.

The film is very faithful to the Joyce story. Gabriel is attending the annual party hosted by his Aunts Julia and Kate. Everybody knows each other well, and they are sincerely polite to each other. The audience is sent back to a time of gentle courtesy when people danced the waltz at their parties. The actors really give the impression of belonging to 1904 Dublin.

The individual foibles of the characters are subtly shown, including Gabriel's nervousness in preparing to give a toast, and Freddy Malin's drunkenness. The supporting cast is excellent: each character seems interesting, and until the end, no one character monopolizes the scenes.

As always with Joyce, though, not all is pleasant. Although the people are sincerely kind, political and religious tensions often surface in their conversation. One example is when the patriotic Miss Ivors calls him a "West Briton" for writing for an English newspaper.

The film, which although gentle is never boring, intensifies in the last few scenes. Gabriel's wife, Gretta, is very much moved

ever seen who can play two flutes simultaneously. Cynthia Watson simply sparkled as the over-sexed Concertina. She was absolutely wonderful, and never failed to make the audience laugh.

As I mentioned earlier, this production was improvised, and understandably there

were some moments when things did not go off exactly as planned. But there were also those spontaneous moments where everything clicked and the result was magic. That is the beauty of improvisational theatre. Even with the rough spots, I still left the theatre smiling.

# 1904 Dublin comes alive in *The Dead*



**A toast to the Ireland of yesterday**

by a song she hears one of the guests sing, and falls pensive. Gabriel tries to find out what is making her so sad. She tells him that when she was a girl, she loved a boy who always sang that song: "I think he died for me," she says.

Gabriel is disturbed by this confession, and, staring out at the snow falling outside, reflects on love and death. His thoughts sum up the meaning of the movie, drawing together various scenes so that everything suddenly seems to fit.

The scenes of old Aunt Julia singing a cracked soprano, the poem on self-sacrificing love that one guest recites, and the references to dead singers and the good old days of Ireland — together they show the melancholy of death, and loss of love. Everything passes to the same fate, thinks Gabriel, as the snow falls "upon all the living and the

dead."

This is Joyce's epiphany lovingly brought to the screen by John Huston, with the help of an excellent cast. Angelica Huston is particularly striking as Gretta: she tells the story of Michael Furey, her first love, with heart-wrenching sincerity. Donal McCann plays Gabriel skillfully. Most of the actors are Irish, so their speech rings true.

The direction is wonderful. Although most of the film takes place indoors, the camera work is always interesting. The final shots of snow falling over Ireland have stark beauty.

*The Dead* has a certain purity about it. It is sensitive, warm, sincere and moves your emotion honestly. Huston died before it was released, and you can sense that it was filmed with the reflective wisdom of a dying man. What a beautiful swansong. *The Dead* is a classic.

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