

films

Critic finds latest Citadel production not so hut

It would probably be a mistake to qualify the Citadel's latest offering, *The Little Hut*, as theatre of any kind. Such productions should be forgotten quickly. *The Little Hut* is a post-World War II period piece designed to relieve social tensions. It is, in other words, an entertainment. Indeed it has certain pseudo-intellectual undercurrents (biologico-social in nature) but the centre of interest is the usual love triangle with a slightly unoriginal twist to it.

The husband turns out to be the passionate one (if you can call it passion) and the lover-neurotically jealous. Of course such a situation (if there is such a thing as a situation) makes for much laughter of a light, frothy kind. The play in itself is really quite harmless (not always a virtue—even in comedy); the present production is an insult to the play and the play-goers of Edmonton. It does not entertain, it does not enlighten. It bores.

The essence of good comic production is the willingness of all involved to do light violence to everything, including the play itself. If the director does not ini-

tiate such violence the play is a flop. Mr. Glenn is seriously at fault for thinking he can do a merely gay, tripping, and mindless production of any kind of entertainment, and at the same time play down the violence, the offensiveness.

Mr. Glenn has a penchant for avoiding the offensive (eg. the better but more vulgar translation he could have used in *Three Penny Opera*). Is Mr. Glenn afraid of what he thinks or seems to think is a homely but well-off upper middle class audience? If Mr. Glenn is either unwilling or unable to be violent in his productions then why does he make such insane choices of plays with which to be polite?

If one goes to this high church of third rate professionalism one should be prepared to watch a group of three well-experienced actors pull a wet rag out of the sink to the point where, half-way through the last act there is a suggestion that one is watching what is usually called a comedy.

Mr. Wardwell as Philip the frolicsome husband does the best job of avoiding that dangerous

epithet, miscast. Mr. Bonnell, who, in spite of an entertaining effort in *Three Penny*, has yet to be given a real job to do on the Citadel stage, is on the verge of being miscast in this play. Mr. Bonnell plays Henry the harried lover. Ruth Livingston as the womanly wife is a question mark. The vivacity necessary to carry off her part as well as the tone of the play as a whole is not there. Other presences on stage are Paul Staheli and Donald Cook.

The technical end of *The Little Hut* production (lights, stage-setting, make-up, and costuming) looks sick beside the job done at Studio Theatre before Christmas. Were that interesting production of Machiavelli's *La Mandragola* not so long past more than a brief praise would be given it here. But even then it would probably be a mistake to say anything about a Studio Theatre production, or so I am led to believe.

Apparently, local theatre and theatre reviewing (be the theatre foolish or the reviewing foul-mouthed) should be suffered in rhetorical and abject silence.

—Peter Montgomery

Gounod's masterpiece fausted off on public as centennial project

People who examine warhorse repertory operas honestly, clearly, and objectively are of several minds about the merits of Charles Gounod's *Faust*. Some of them think it one of the greatest of the repertory operas; others think it is a basically good opera with a lot of weak moments; still others think it a basically bad opera with a lot of good moments; and some think it rotten to the core, utterly unredeemed by anything.

I myself waver between the second and the third judgements. It is not one of my favorite operas, and certainly as a musical representation of Goethe's masterpiece verges on the laughable. Undoubtedly there are a lot of very

mediocre things in it (most of the choruses and a good deal of the transitional music); but equally indubitably there are moments of great lyrical inspiration (the love duet, the final trio).

This is the Edmonton Professional Opera Association's Centennial project (it will play at the Jubilee, January 25 and 27), and as such it seems to me a bad choice. There are dozens of better operas as yet unperformed in Edmonton, most of them by Mozart.

But the choice has been made, and it is irrevocable; besides, as has been said many times, we are not exactly overwhelmed by hordes of opera productions in Edmonton, and so it goes without saying that

we welcome anything that comes along.

The plot of Goethe's original is well enough known not to need retelling, but it had better be said that in Gounod's libretto, Faust himself (far from being a more or less sober man who happens to be doing a quadruple doctorate in the Black Arts) is a rather trivial and 100% saccharine wishy-washy liberal who gives the distinct im-



pression of being caught in this ghastly story by mistake. Nevertheless, for a trivial, saccharine, wishy-washy liberal he gets some pretty good love music to sing.

It seems to me that the heroine, Marguerite (daughter of a prominent cigar manufacturer), is a failure. She is so pure, virtuous, sticky, sentimental, bashful, charming, and sweet that not even by allowing herself to get seduced by Faust can she work herself into our good graces.

Her brother, Valentine, is a stereotyped Defender of the Innocent, and gets much of the trash to sing. But he is scarce enough not to be painful.

As usual, the most interesting character is morally the worst — in this case, Mephistopheles, otherwise known as the Fiend from Hell, or "that dirty old man from the bowels of the earth". He has some fairly convincing diabolical music

Gambit (at the Odeon) is a good movie, but don't drop everything and rush down to see it right this minute; keep calm, leaf debonairly through the pages of our respected contemporary the E*****n J***** until you come to the theatre page, and check precisely when *Gambit* is being shown.

It really is important that you see the film from beginning to end, because the beginning is a very neat trick, splendidly handled.

Needless to say, I'm not going to breathe a word about the plot (I hope you realize how noble I'm being; describing this plot would be fun).

But I suppose it wouldn't be indiscreet to mention that the lead roles are played by Michael Caine and Shirley MacLaine.

MacLaine is, of course, reliable given good material. Caine demonstrated his ability to enliven fairly stinko material in *Alfie*, and rises effortlessly to the level of his current, quite intelligent script. It's one of these will-they-get-away-with-the-perfect-crime affairs, with lots of plush sets, exotic scenery, and twisty plotting. And it's amusing in a remarkably pleasant way.

Actually you should all stay away from the Odeon for the next little while; then they'll bring in the next show on their list, and that, according to the preview, is Francois Truffaut's *Fahrenheit 451*, from Ray Bradbury's novel.

Film Society members will remember Truffaut's *Jules et Jim* (shown here two years ago), one of the finest films I've ever seen. The new film is said to be good, so watch for it.

In case you're waiting breathlessly for me to review *The Blue Max*, forget it.

Not the least terrible thing about war-movies is their capacity for turning murder into prettiness—"Lookit all the cute old planes, Sonny!"—and I prefer to get my kicks elsewhere.

But if German uniforms really turn you on, and you've got \$2 to indulge your Tendencies, no doubt you couldn't find a more respectable outlet for your sadism in Edmonton at the moment. For masochists, I'd still recommend *The Sound of Music*.

I'd like to reassure anyone who, what with exams and all, didn't get to see *After the Fox* while it was here that it's quite a disappointing movie. Peter Sellars takes it over, and hence there are lots of nice things moment by moment, but as a whole it's a drag.

Why this should be so, when Sellars and Britt Eklund and the rest of the cast do fine jobs (an especially brilliant sustained self-parody by Victor Mature is probably the best thing in the film) is a bit puzzling. I'm inclined to blame Neil Simon, who wrote the script, and Vittorio de Sica, who directed.

Simon is by all accounts no mean hand with a Broadway comedy, but this doesn't guarantee anything when it comes to screen-writing. And de Sica, who used to be one of the world's better directors, is either going to pieces or is in a pique over having to turn out potboilers.

To judge by this latest effort, and by that other oddly botched vehicle, *Marriage Italian Style*, he has no instinct at all for comic timing, and the in-jokes about Neo-realism (the movement in immediately post-war Italian cinema with which his best films were associated) come out sad and a bit ill.

While we're in a Lo-what-a-noble-mind-is-here-o'erthrown vein, I finally caught up with the latest Hitchcock, *Torn Curtain*, showing currently in darkest rural Alberta—well, not really, just Wetaskiwin—with Paul Newman as a stupid American boy-physicist and Julie Andrews as a stupid Anglo-American girl-physicist.

It's hard to imagine what Hitchcock thought he was doing, if indeed he was thinking at all. My theory is that everything is deliberate, and that Hitchcock is making a sardonic commentary on the banality of the Cold War, or at least on the banality of Paul Newman and Julie Andrews, or just possibly on the banality of Alfred Hitchcock.

—John Thompson

to sing, and a lot of really gratifying nasty cracks about the stupidity of Faust, Marguerite, and most of the other characters.

As with *Tosca*, there are two ways of approaching *Faust*, both of them quite satisfying: you can either lap it all up, be convinced by all the music, or you can enjoy the really good sections and regard the rest as a fun camp experience.

Since this is the EPOA's Centennial project, the cast will be all-but-one Canadian (the exception is American bass Richard Cross, who will sing Mephistopheles). Edmontonian Ermanno Mauro will

sing Faust, Heather Thompson of Sadler's Wells will play Marguerite, and baritone Glyn Williams will be Valentine. The whole schmozzle will be led by everybody's favorite conductor, the urbane Mr. Brian Priestman.

If I have by any chance given the impression that *Faust* is not well worth seeing, I am deeply penitent. I urge you all to zoom (faster than a speeding bullet) down to Heintzman's and procure yourself a ticket by fair means or foul while there are still some available.

—Bill Beard

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