

arts

No-nukes
go to GreecePlays at the Nightwood
have topical subjects

By SARA MEURLING

Culture," says Nightwood Theatre's Cynthia Grant, "should be more than entertainment, and entertainment should be used to address issues."

To wit, Nightwood's production of *Peace Banquet*, billed as "Ancient Greece Meets the Atomic Age," faces the issue of nuclear war with a humorous Aristophanic comedy. Unusual? Not for Nightwood. The Nightwood Theatre Company is a dynamic and motivated group that produces original pieces with topical subject matter, a method that unfortunately seems to make the average audience member pass over their productions in favor of lighter works.

It's easy to see why one would be skeptical of a group like Nightwood: any group as pro-women's rights, anti-nuke, and anti-Nicaraguan conflict as this one might immediately seem too bleeding-heart liberal to be seriously objective of any situation.

But a second look shows that they can face current problems with humor and insight. The company—which includes York Graduate Theatre Department faculty member Dean Gilmour—has adapted Aristophanes' fifth century play *Peace* "to address the nature of the struggle for peace in our times." It was evolved as a witty and entertaining piece with a tongue in cheek humor that points up many problems in the mass attitude to the nuclear arms race.

The well-rounded production, performed at St. Paul's Square on Avenue Road, seems ideally suited to the adapted church. The audience area is set up as a cafe, with small tables and chairs flanked on both sides by



Maureen White and York Graduate Theatre faculty member Dean Gilmour, as the beetle and Trig in Nightwood Theatre's *Peace Banquet*.

stages. The recorder and acoustic guitar music do much to set the tone of the play; the acoustics of the playing space may indeed have made the success of the production.

The production is a feast for the senses. The costumes are simple and effective—just brilliantly-colored togas with bits of glitter and feathers. The words and thoughts are expressive and bawdy, a seeming contradiction that works. And for those who wish their physical hunger satisfied, there are small containers of beetle food (black jellybeans) on each table.

The first act closely follows the Aristophanes and is filled with the bawdy humor of the original text. The hero (Gilmour) sets out to find the Lady Peace. He flies to heaven on the back of a dung beetle, Maureen White, a creature which symbolizes, as we are told, the modern intellectual and the excrement we are forced to digest in place of truth.

In heaven, he meets mindless angels, as well as War and his henchman. One performance stands out among the angels, and that is of Micah Barnes, who plays his celestial being with an absurd seriousness that is wonderful to

see. War, played by Sky Gilbert, is a truly laughable pompous tyrannical little upstart. His henchmen, White and Kim Renders as Corruption and Chaos, are buffoons, pawns of War and their own stupidity. They, as the bad guys, with their buddy, Peace Maker, trick the hero into believing he has found peace, an example of modern man's confusion between Peace and Peace Making.

The second act is an absurdist dinner party. Peace is a chained guest who is abused by recognizable stereotypes of the ruling classes. Though there were stumbling lines and some bits that seemed entirely extraneous, the act works well and is fast-paced enough to carry the flaws. The seeming spontaneity of the act is startling and it is not until after the performance is over that it becomes apparent that it is an improvisational piece—merely something laid out in an outline, with signpost lines to ensure that no relevant points are overlooked.

If you think your view of the arms race is becoming jaundiced through exposure to a propagandist media, see *Peace*. It runs through Saturday.

Male-female love trilogy at Beckett Theatre

By NIGEL TURNER

The comedy of love and male-female relationships was the subject of three short plays performed last week in the Samuel Beckett Theatre in Stong College, *The Mistress* by Don Munroe and *Creation* and *Synopsis* by Wendy Walters.

Munroe, a York graduate and former teaching assistant, calls his play a "serious comedy." Directed by Gunther Oldenburg, *The Mistress* follows the development of an affair between a professor (George Parawin-chak) and Victoria Greene, one of his students (Liz Murry).

The story takes place over a period of 10 years. Each of its roughly 10 scenes represents one day out of each year which encapsulates the state of the affair. During this time, the professor undergoes a steady decline while his victorious student rises, eventually becoming a rival faculty member.

The play opens with the professor reciting a dramatic poem by Lord Byron, but Parawin-chak's delivery lacked the vitality it deserved.

The other plays were written and directed by Wendy Walters, a York Theatre student. *Creation* is an absurdist play set in the beginning of time. A love-struck God (Keven

Prentice) is pitted against Goddess (Nancy Snowball) who uses his devotion to her in order to rule as she pleases. She forces him to create Man (Jamie Johnson) and then Woman (Fiona Chaplin) but later demands that he destroy them. God refuses to submit and goes on to rule alone.

Walters's other play *Synopsis* uses the same cast. It is a humorous tragedy, centred on the main character Samuel (Keven Prentice) who is a hopeless romantic. He becomes obsessed with a girl he and a friend pick up at a bar. In the end he is broken-hearted and emotionally dead.

Contrast works in French film

By CATHERINE ASTLEY SUDDS

Successful male screen duos more often than not owe their appeal to contrasting physical and personal characteristics—Laurel and Hardy, Abbott and Costello, Lemmon and Matthau, and more recently Nick Nolte and Eddie Murphy. The characters bounce off each other, conflicting because of their differences and yet complementing each other to often touching and hilarious effect.

So it is with Philippe Noiret and Michel Serrault in the new French comedy *Heads or Tails*. Both actors are well-known for their performances in recent films. Noiret for *Coup de Torchon*, the black comedy set in French West Africa in the 1930s, Serrault for his notoriously camp performance in the long-running *La Cage Aux Folles*. Teaming these actors of great comic talents was an enormous coup for director Robert Enrico.

The film is a mixture of thriller and comedy, suspenseful, witty and at all times off-beat. The two main characters of the film have more in common than it at first appears. Both in their fifties and nearing retirement, and both soured by a lifetime of living with wives who had "strong personalities."

It is the death of one Mrs. Morlaix that first brings Inspector Baroni (Noiret) and Mr. Morlaix (Serrault) together, getting the plot and sub-plot of fast-paced intricacy underway.

The narrative has the Inspector strongly suspecting that Mrs. Morlaix's fall from a high-rise apartment was not accidental. The dogged workaholic Baroni, who also lives alone after the death of his wife, follows and hounds the mild-mannered (though at times prickly) Morlaix with the intention of making him "crack." The pair become a team and develop a camaraderie—two lonely souls who want to make something of their new-found freedom from conjugal obligation but don't know quite where to start.

Morlaix has a dream—to leave his impersonal office and dull job for an exotic island full of "dark lovelies and coconuts." He unexpectedly hears his dream in a final humorous plot twist that provides a satisfying comic conclusion.

Baroni, pot-bellied and even in old age rebellious and anti-establishment, and Morlaix, mincing and old-womanish, subject to unexpected outbursts, ironically make a more than endearing "husband and wife" team—thanks largely to the economy of dialogue used to lay out the intricate plots, and the witty laconicism of the characters' repartee.

Although *Heads or Tails* is a detective story, a yarn concerning high and low drama in a small provincial town, it is first and foremost an affectionate look at two eccentric off-beat characters.

Muraille's Mein a cliched Macbeth update

By NANCY WEBSTER

Richard Rose's *Mein*, conceived by the Autumn Angel Repertory and playing at Theatre Passe Muraille (until December 5) is not a particularly original product, despite all its declarations. Claims of unique and experimental material abound, but in reality, the play is a cliched reworking of the theme of MacBeth's fatal ambition transferred into the modern struggle to climb the corporate ladder. Rose's admirers may be disappointed: *Mein* cannot be placed in the same class as his award-winning and innovative *Tamara*.

Mein, however, is not without its merits. Dorian Clark's design is captivating. The actors' space is a gridded squash court in shades of ethereal blue. The audience sits in the gallery above. The cast makes striking entrances and exits through swinging doors which at first are unnoticed by the audience. The set stresses the theme of competition and does it well.

Mein is a perfect example of ensemble acting. There are moments which seem particularly noteworthy but are outshone by each actor's individual brilliance. The cast members should be praised for their balanced, energetic performances.

There is a tightly-knit choreography to the piece which appeals and fascinates. One actor may maneuver an unseen character while the others scream and contort, representing various facets of his conscience. Thus, the

Finding the
theatre is part
of the drama

By ANNA GRANT

There is a small theatre in downtown Toronto where finding the building is as much a part of the theatrical experience as the performance itself.

Entering through the back door you find yourself a few steps from the large room where the performance takes place. The walls and ceiling are painted black, the floor is covered with sheets of plywood, and around the room are benches made of pine slats.

The name of the theatre is Actor's Lab. In existence for 12 years, its primary objective is the "research and development of the craft of the actor, writer, and director." It is not a conventional theatre. There is no concern for comfortable illusions or glossed-over versions of dramatic reality. There are no rows of neatly-spaced seats. There is no plush carpeting, no stage, no curtain, no physical barrier of any sort to divide audience from actor.

The current season is divided between a connected series of new works, titled *Canadian Alchemy*, and repertory performances. Most of the material consists of original productions or familiar works which have been adapted by the ensemble. The two performances currently playing—*Renaissance*, created and performed by Daniel Baillargeon, and *Rasputin in Jerusalem*, created and performed by Richard Nieoczym—are part of the new works.

As the lights slowly rise, it becomes apparent that the work here has little to do with what one thinks of as a play. What happens can best be described as ritual or celebration. For all that can be seen in this dimly lit room (sometimes with only one light placed directly on the floor) is an actor dancing, speaking, singing, changing his costume, lighting candles or incense, and chanting. All of this takes place in a seemingly illogical sequence.

You begin to wonder if what you're watching is theatre at all. Unlike a traditional theatrical performance which could be interpreted in terms of conventional theatrical values (the lights, costumes, and set), there is no way to even describe what has been experienced.

But even if you cannot translate what you've seen in rational terms, there is an impact: spiritually and psychically by the presence of an actor—a human soul, lost, searching, frightened, discovering happiness and joy. And in spite of what you perceive to be flaws—the discomfort, confusion, and lack of continuity there is a strange feeling of having been overwhelmed by something genuine, intense, and profound.

When the performance is over you begin to wonder how much our customary, analytical approach to theatre has subverted our natural, spontaneous reaction.



Cast members of Richard Rose's *Mein*.

superficiality and internal workings of a character are precisely illustrated both physically and vocally.

As a piece of entertainment then, *Mein* is well worth seeing. The action is thoughtful and quickly paced. But if you are looking for a unique experience in theatre, don't look here. Tickets are \$5 and \$6 or pay-what-you-can for Sunday matinees.