

New women's theatre troupe

Kopit play challenges concepts of sanity

By BOB McBRIDE

Good Night Ladies, a series of one act plays by the new Toronto Women's Theatre, reveals in the troupe an abundance of talent and an imaginative selection of material.

The group is determined to present widely divergent images of women in the contemporary world. This produc-

tion includes Arrabal's The First Communion, a sketch by Leonard Cohen entitled The New Step, and Arthur Kopit's Chamber Music. Arrabal's piece is a fantasy ritual of initiation, Cohen's a comic commentary on the relativity of beauty and Kopit's a fascinating study of politics, illusion and identity.

The first two presentations of the

evening are little more than sketches. Their brevity and relative simplicity leave the audience with merely a taste of the group's abilities, and no little worry that the evening will close far too quickly.

ACT TACKLED

But any such fears are laid aside when the actors tackle Kopit's one act extravaganza. The action ostensibly takes place in a mental hospital where each inmate has adopted the identity of a historical character, including Amelia Earhart, Joan of Arc, Mrs. Mozart, Gertrude Stein, Queen Isabella of Spain, Ossa Johnson and Susan Anthony. Echoes of many playwrights including Pirandello, Peter Weiss and Edward Albee sound throughout the play.

The inmates plot a cannibalistic attack on the men's ward, a plan which has its own terrifying internal logic. One senses that any group with shared perceptions and fixed identities defines its own version of sanity; he who does not fit in is, ipso facto, insane.

Within this group of inmates, it is "Amelia Earhart" who is the outsider. She therefore becomes the scapegoat, the sacrificial victim whose body is sent to the men's ward in order to underline the women's sincerity.

Kopit's Chamber Music shakes one's self-conception to its very roots. Identity is seen as fluid and ever-changing, tenuously based on a series of roles.

The doctor who appears in this mental ward is no less an actor than the patients; with his white suit and serious expression, he is a "doctor" in the same way that a suit of armour and a cross define Joan of Arc. The political interactions of the group are based on a familiar pattern of strategy, power and prestige. Sanity and madness become equivocal: we see ourselves mirrored in madmen. Are we mad to think we are anybody?

REPERTORY
The skills revealed by the performers, especially in Chamber Music, are many and varied. The group exudes confidence and an obvious compatibility. Their timing and delivery is at all times sharp and concise, and they remain remarkably "in character" throughout.

A number of the actors play two roles; the lone male performer, Denis Hayes appears in all three productions. It is difficult to choose one person who stands out above the rest, as the key to this troupe's success seems

to lie in its well-balanced distribution of talent.

Jo Ann McIntyre, who appears in the Leonard Cohen sketch and again in Chamber Music, proves herself a versatile performer as she moves from a fat lady to a stuttering writer with ease and aplomb. But all the performers deserve equal credit.

Good Night Ladies is playing at the Colonnade Theatre, 131 Bloor St. W., until March 16th after which, the group hopes to find a new home.

Tickets are \$3, and reservations can be made at 925-4573.

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