

REVIEW

by Walter Plinge



Mark Schoenberg's production of Anton Chekov's play, *The Seagull* opened last Thursday night at the Studio Theatre. It is a fine example of some of the richness that a revival of one of the classics of the theatre has to offer. In many ways this play is much more a piece of theatre than it is of a drama. As a drama it is an eloquent slow-motion eulogy that conjures up a vision of the passing of a faded glory. Chekov's characters bewail the dreariness of their lives amidst the vacancy of their present situation. As a piece of theatre, *The Seagull* is an occasion which demands a celebration of the most basic art of the theatre: to fill the stage with life. In this production, the challenge has been accepted and dealt with in an admirable if not wholeheartedly successful manner.

The story concerns a Russian family spending their days at a country estate. They are a totally eclectic collection of persons cast together by the workings of indiscriminate fate. There are money problems, repressed desires, delayed romances, and attempts at the artistic life intertwining through their lives like a pattern determining their existence. In some ways the play is a rosetta stone to Chekov's art. Amongst the dialogues are tiny exposures of the frustrating abstractions which penetrate our lives like the nature of the art of creation, or symbols that embody indiscernible meanings. Inscrutable significances that give no hint as to their true meaning. Chekov's characters search for meaningfulness in every possible direction

the seagull was true to life

and it is the actors that make these come alive for us and call our attention to them for our consideration.

The acting in this production is on a fairly successful and accomplished level. In some cases more than accomplished and in others mildly disappointing. What is important in Chekov and is done well in this case is that the cast act as an ensemble. There are two singularly fine contributions to this ensemble that deserve mention and these are the performances of Betty Oliver as Arkadina, and Jean-Pierre Fournier as Shamrayev, the family Steward. Arkadina is displayed in full-blown character by Miss Oliver. Her command of the character is both expressive and impressive. Fournier brings an added dash of zip to his characterization which is quite captivating. But there is an enterprising and distinct richness to all of the characterizations which are all well defined. That is an necessity in a Chekov play.

The play wends its way through silences and the empty words by maintaining an abundance of life. All the little things that change life are on display. Snuff boxes, seagulls, medallions with messages, and valarium drops. These things become the cues for attention whilst the characters otherwise mourn for their life. Sorin in his old age regrets that he never lived his life. They are tortured by the tedium in their lives, they seem always to be thwarted in their attempts to grab hold of their destinies. Their existence seems to threaten to dwindle into total insignificance. As time progresses they clutch at feebler and feebler dreams. Sorin thinks his life would be better if only he were in town. Nina thinks her life will become exciting and dramatic in a romantic way if she "goes on the stage".

This tedium is a calculated risk for every director. There is every danger that the tedium will set in and dull the audiences reception. It doesn't in this production. The stage is always filled with life. The production exists in a total environment. The air is full of the sound of crickets and other outdoor creatures. Mosquitoes persist in pestering the characters. The actors are always alive, interacting with their situations, involved with their lives. Even in the most vacant moments they are full of life.

Mark Schoenberg's direction is forthright and uncompromising. He has elicited from the play a great deal of the richness that lies within Chekov's art. Particularly pleasing is the clarity with which the production is blessed. Seldom has the plays meaning seemed so clear. None of the plot lines are lost and all of them are easy to follow. There is a jocular, if delicate spirit to this play which would make demands on any director. It richly rewards those who succeed in being true to it, as is the case here. One may quibble about certain aspects of interpretation but there are none offered that are unacceptable.

G. Keatley's set is a considerable and pleasing achievement. Her use of triangular set pieces facilitates the changes in scene and sacrifices none of the atmospheric qualities she has managed to create as the perfect complement to the direction.

If you don't have your tickets yet, you'd better hurry. It's interesting enough to make even a matinee worthwhile and that's about all the tickets you'll be able to find.

footnotes

TUESDAY FEB. 13

Soprano Susan Goodwin, third year Bachelor of Music student in the Department of Music, will give a recital. She will be accompanied by pianist Judith Loewen. Place: Convocation Hall, Arts Building; Time: 4:30 p.m.; Admission: Free.

The Northwest Mountaineering Club: A regular meeting in V-110, with discussion on next summer's climbing, and a slide presentation by Peter Ford on the Logan Mountains. For further info call Harmut Von Gaza at 433-3092.

Labor Relations Colloquia at 3:30 p.m. Prof. A.B. Nedd (Business Administration) "Wider Implications of Motivator-Hygiene Theory" Dept of Sociology Tory 5-15 (fifth floor)

"Table-Talk" - Don't munch alone - try our cheap but sumptuous lunch (35 cents). Tuesdays at 12:30 p.m. in SUB Meditation Room. This week a continuation of our discussions on "Bio-Medical Ethics" with tapes by Dr. Joseph Fletcher (author of 'Situation Ethics'). The topic will be Genetic Control.

The Debating Society will be meeting at 7 P.M. in SUB 270 (Council Chambers).

Anyone wishing to sing, play, or listen, is invited to RATT at 8:00 p.m. till 11:30, for an Open Stage. No admission charge, though donations are appreciated. Sponsored by Edmonton Folk Club.

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WEDNESDAY, FEB. 14

Introductory lecture in Transcendental Meditation (T.M.) to be given by a teacher of T.M., Dennis Michaelchuk in the Tory Building, 14th Floor, Graduate Student's Lounge.

Oboist Hiromi Takahashi, second year Bachelor of Music student in the Department of Music, will give a recital of works by Telemann, Haydn and Hindemith. He will be accompanied by pianist Judith Loewen. Place: Convocation Hall, Arts Building, Time: 4:30 p.m.. Admission: Free.

THURSDAY, FEB. 15

The people of Vietnam have won a great victory with the signing of the ceasefire. Come and hear Jean Vautour, Canadian Peace Congress organizer, speak of the ceasefire. The place is SUB 104; the time is 12:00.

The Campus Crusade for Christ's regular meeting is again at 7:00 p.m. in SUB rm 280. The topic of the second Basic Leadership Training Class is "Prayer". Prayer is "talking to God", who is the only one you can talk to anywhere, anytime. Please don't miss it.

FRIDAY, FEB. 16

Joe Sorrentino will be speaking on "The Mafia in Canada" at 7 P.M. in Dinwoodie. All welcome.

Clarinetist Deborah Alpaugh, third year Bachelor of Music student in the Department of Music, will give a recital of works by Mozart, Finzi and Poulenc. She will be assisted by Madeleine Wheeler, pianist, and Neil Hughes, violist. PLACE: Convocation Hall, Arts Building. TIME: 4:30 p.m. ADMISSION: Free.

The University of Alberta String Quartet (Thomas Rolston and Lawrence Fisher, violins; Michael Bowie, viola; Claude Kenneson, violoncello) will give a concert of works by Brahms and Clermont Pepin. PLACE: Convocation Hall. TIME: 8:30 p.m. ADMISSION: Free.

GENERAL FOOTNOTES

Malaysian-Singapore Night: MSSA will be organising a night of fun and entertainment on Sun 25 Feb at RATT. There will also be a buffet dinner at 6 p.m. Tickets are available from the Committee members. Dateline for tickets is 17 Feb. For further information, contact Randy at 439-1316.

Attention over 25's -- the Planning Committee For Continuing University Education students. Noon-hour Drop-in Centre is hopeful of establishing a similar organization to that at University of British Columbia. We need you at next meeting - watch for date!

Feb. 15, 16, 17 (Thursday, Friday, Saturday), the U of A Mixed Chorus will hold their annual series of concerts at 8:30 p.m. nightly in SUB Theatre. Music will range from Alleluia, to Aquarius, to westside story to Dry Bones! Tickets: \$1.50 from SUB members.

The University Art Gallery will have an exhibition of oil sketches by Jack Taylor, a late professor of the Department of Art & Design from February 14 to 28. Also on display will be ceramic portraits, landscapes and animals by Joe Fafard, a Saskatchewan sculptor. The gallery can be found in the old president's house, between the Faculty Club and the Biological Sciences Building. Hours are 11-5 weekdays.

CKSR director

A director for S.U. Radio CKSR is required. Responsibilities will include supervising all program content, salaried and volunteer staff supervision, facility and equipment care and handling of funds.

Interested applicants should have experience in radio broadcasting and/or radio electronics. Salary will be approximately \$200/mo. summer and winter. Copies of the CKSR By-law and current operating budget are available at the receptionists desk, 2nd floor S.U.B. Applications can also be obtained here and can be submitted to the receptionist or to Garry West.

Deadline for applications is Feb. 20.

EDUCATION

STUDENTS' ASSOCIATION

Nominations are open for two undergraduate Education students on General Faculties Council. Students who are elected will retain these seats until April 30, 1974. Applications are available from the Education Students' Association office, Room B-69, Education Building. Nominations close 5:00 p.m. Wednesday, February 21.

D.C. McGinnis
Returning Officer

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