



Strawbs' folk turns to rock

By WARREN CLEMENTS

With the release of its fifth major album, Hero and Heroine, Strawbs has weathered almost total internal reorganization and a complete overhaul of style to claim a small but avid circle of fans.

The centre of the British group is Dave Cousins, an inventive and imaginative lyricist with a strained nasal voice, that grasps at high notes like a seal leaping after an elusive fish.

He started his group in the mid-60s as a bluegrass trio called The Strawberry Hill Boys. A debut album in 1967 with Sandy Denny (from Fairport Convention) was never released, and two others, Strawbs and Dragonfly, never made it to this side of the ocean (though plans to release them are in the works).

HANGMAN TUNE

By the time he recorded Just a Collection of Antiques and Curios in 1970 live at Queen Elizabeth Hall and From the Witchwood, the trio had become a quintet, including keyboard magician Rick Wakeman, now with Yes. Cousins dwelt on sombre moments like The Hangman and the Papist, in which the hangman is forced to hang his younger brother for a religious crime; while bassist John Ford and drummer Richard Hudson offered light tunes like comic relief in a particularly moody and introspective movie.

When Wakeman left, pianist Blue Weaver replaced Wakeman's intricate wizardry with loud thundering chords. But Strawbs' next album Grave New World remained distinctively Dave Cousins: pained and moody, tempered with a throwaway jingle by the Old Tyme Dance Orchestra and a Jethro Tullish jaunt with the Robert Kirby Silver Band.

Cousins went off to make a rocking solo album, Two Weeks Last September, which proved mainly that his voice is more hoarse than raunchy, and better suited to folk than rock. On his return, rock guitarist Dave Lambert replaced folk-oriented Tony Hooper on Bursting at the Seams.

INTERNAL WAR

The war between electric and folk didn't make for a very cohesive band, but the battle was most entertaining. While Ford and Hudson worked on the pub-rocker Part of the Union, Cousins experimented with everything from symphony orchestras to a hymn sung by a room full of schoolchildren.

After the battle, everyone left the group except Cousins and Lambert; like a godsend, John Hawken came in on keyboards and breathed life into their current album, Hero and Heroine.

Cousins' lyrics are still about emptiness and loneliness, but all the musicians seem happy. In fact, Lambert's Just Love is distressingly bubble-gummish. Cousins has become more tuneful, the chorale sparkles on Shine on Silver Sun, and there's a King Crimson-like overture with mellotron and drumbeat.

It's a far cry from Grave New World, but the new rock-orchestral direction is rather pleasant.

Strawbs is a dependable group; you can buy their albums without listening to them first and have no regrets about the buy. There aren't too many groups you can say that about.

Godot hasn't arrived yet

Waiting exposes human absurdities

By BOB McBRIDE

Waiting For Godot is many different plays just as one man is really a succession of individuals. Depending on the viewer's mood, or succession of moods during the performance, the play can be a lament of anguish and futility or a gesture of absurd hope and hilarity.

In the Menagerie Players production now playing at the Central Library Theatre, the essence of Beckett's classic, the relationship between time and habit, comes across with sufficient force to move any sentient member of the audience.

Two tramps waiting; Beckett has

raised a common fact of the human condition, that we scurry through habitual rituals in the irrational hope that something will happen, to a level of art through his heightened awareness of the passing of time and his beautiful, yet economical use of words.

TIME

Beckett presents us with an essential paradox; time is constant and ceaseless, yet it is also an illusion since nothing really ever happens; the essentials of birth, intervening habit, suffering and death remain constant through eternity.

Man's self-conscious awareness

allows him to glimpse the painful absurdity of the human condition, but the agony of such awareness must be squelched through the deadening repetition of everyday rituals.

The two tramps, Vladimir and Estragon, in their constant game-playing and incessant banter, attempt to escape, as we do, from the suffering of being, reflecting our interdependence, absurdity and evanescence. And the Menagerie Players, with David Beard as Estragon and Andrew Bassett-Spiers as Vladimir, develop the themes of time and habit to full flower.

But the production is marred by the

shakiness of John Wood as Pozzo, the despot who, with his slave Lucky, enters the waiting world of the tramps.

Wood is unable to bring forth the power of his many important lines. His delivery is evidently marred by a lack of confidence which makes many of his speeches fuzzy or inaudible. One hopes that he will gain strength as the play's run continues (until April 6) so that Beckett's illusion is not broken by weak links in the chain of action.

The Central Library Theatre, at 20 St. George Street, charges \$2.50 for student admission. Phone 489-1314 during the day or 924-8950 at night.

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