

## A Touch of the Poet bombs

# Better casting would have helped this play

By LYNN SLOTKIN

A Touch of the Poet by Eugene O'Neill is long, wordy, and boring. Indeed one begins to think the production will be a long night's journey into day.

The play, set in America in 1828, is a bit Pirandello-ish. The main character, Cornelius Melody, played by Edward Binns, believes he is something he is not — a gentleman. He tries to forget what he considers unpleasant about his past, his Irish peasant roots and accent, and he constantly relives what he considers pleasant. His wife Nora (Jennifer Phipps) and daughter Sara (Vivian Reis) have no time for such airs, they are too busy trying to make ends meet by tending to the family inn. But that's not to say that Nora and Sara are without their dreams. Nora pretends her husband loves her and is stoical when he mistreats her. Sara is in love with one of the boarders, a sensitive, poetical man. He is never seen but his presence is always felt.

Sara's life is a parallel to her mother's. Cornelius was a sensitive poetical young man, who grew into a coarse, mean older man. One knows that Sara's idea of prince charming

will come crashing to the ground, and this makes her seem all the more tragic.

Edward Binns is not strong or domineering enough as Cornelius. His guise as a gentleman is laughable not authoritarian. His refined accent is a cross between W.C. Fields and George C. Scott playing Rochester in Jane Eyre. He is convincing when he disregards the pretense and becomes an Irish accented brute, but that is 15 minutes before the end of the play and too late.

Vivian Reis is properly tense and tough with her father and when speaking of her lover, giddy and soft.

Jennifer Phipps is admirable as the silent suffering, worn out Nora. Although Marilyn Lightstone as Deborah is cool and confident she is too young for the part. Why director Leon Major cast her in such a role is a mystery.

A Touch of the Poet is not a light evening's entertainment. It's deadly. But for all those high school and university students studying O'Neill, it will no doubt be required viewing, which is probably why the play was chosen to run at the Centre.

## Two Gentlemen of Verona spans 400 years

By RICHARD ANDREANSKY

The Two Gentlemen of Verona now playing at the O'Keefe Centre brings 16th century Milan and Verona to Toronto 1973.

Based on William Shakespeare's original play, the plot is typically complicated. Two gentlemen, Proteus and Valentine are in love with two belles, Julia and Silvia respectively. However Proteus finds Silvia more attractive than Julia yet does not dare to woo his best friend's mistress. The Duke, Silvia's father, is against Silvia's relationship with Valentine for there is also another suitor, Sir Thurio. Proteus betrays Valentine by telling the Duke an elopement is planned. Valentine is banished by the Duke and Proteus now goes after Silvia.

Despite all the difficulties all ends well. In Shakespearean terms Two Gentlemen of Verona is called a comedy.

The 400 year time gap between the original and modern versions of the play is broken by the use of a telephone, a lavishly decorated bicycle and by the fads of the 60's — skipping ropes, frisbies, yo-yos and bat-ball games. These gimmicks are part of the grande finale of the play, probably the most enjoyable part. The ornate costumes bring back the audience to the early setting. The set, a simple construction of stairs and cross planks, also gives the impression of 16th century Italian balconies.

Of course the most distinctive modern feature in Two Gentlemen of Verona is the music. A rock musical is not a suitable title for the play because many varieties of music are heard. The music was composed by Galt MacDermot who also wrote the music for Hair; lyrics are by John Guare. The songs could have been presented better if the actors' voices were not drowned out by the loud orchestra and at times the singing sounded more like screaming.

This version of Two Gentlemen of Verona differs slightly from the original. The dialogue is picked out from the central passages of Shakespeare. Some minor characters are omitted such as the outlaws. And this is unfortunate because they provide a great deal of comedy.

Eglamour is depicted as Silvia's soldier lover, but in Shakespeare he is only an agent for Silvia's escape

from her father. In fact the modern version is a little confusing as to whom Silvia really loves, because she makes love with Proteus, Eglamour and finally Valentine.

More humour is added to the play by the inclusion of modern slang, but it doesn't cheapen it.

The play can be interpreted in many ways. It can be a simple modern day adaptation of one of Shakespeare's comedies. There are also political overtones in connection with war, contrasted with the key theme — love. Eglamour wears a paratrooper's outfit. At one point the dove of peace, suspended by a wire, flies from the balcony onto the stage and back again.

Frank O'Brien as Sir Thurio deserves special mention. First to appear on stage, he dazzles the audience with his falsetto voice and ballet.

The Duke, John McCurry, sets the pace for the musical. He is more like a jazz king than a duke.

Despite some objections to Two Gentlemen of Verona as a mal representation of Shakespeare, this is not true. The play is well adapted to contemporary life and if anachronisms were needed to achieve it, what's wrong with that?

## They sang themselves hoarse

By JOHN OUGHTON

When the Four Horsemen perform, as they did at York last Monday, they reawaken the audience's interest in many types of verbal and vocal events.

Joy in the sound and joy in creating it is what makes them hoarse. The way that the ticket was ripped at the door is a valid comment on the evening: "The Monday Canadian Poe Four Ho" is how is read; or what was said by the audience despite the presence of a pocket of poltroons in the upper left area of the lecture hall who have not yet learned that the art of listening sometimes requires your own silence . . .

When's he going to take a breath? Who's Meyer Coughsky? I thought this was going to be poetry . . . why they're not even reading anything. Look, there's Joe Rosenblatt, roach laureate of Canada. (It was.) I think I see Margaret Atwood! (You don't.) You know I'm hearing my own voice



Vivian Reis as Sara and Edward Binns as Cornelius provide an emotional moment in A Touch of the Poet at the St. Lawrence Centre.

Too bad these moments were few and far between.

## Cultural Briefs

### Theatre dept. presents two plays

The performance students in the theatre department will be presenting George Dandin by Moliere and The Trojan Women by Sartre, in repertory, from Feb. 1 to 4, in Burton. Tickets are free and may be obtained at the box office. Show time is 8:30 p.m. For further information call 667-2370.

### Much Ado About Nothing on CBC

The excellent production of Much Ado About Nothing, produced by Joe Papp and directed by A.J. Antoon, will be televised tomorrow, at 8 pm on CBS. It shouldn't be missed.

### Manfrog performs tonight

"If it is true that theatre is dead, then let's dance on the grave." Such seems to be the theme of Manfrog, a travelling theatre group, dedicated to producing free theatre focusing on social and environmental problems. The group will perform tonight and tomorrow in Absinthe Coffee Shop, Winters, at 9:00 pm and 10:30 pm Admission is free.

differently now. When they all talk at the same time like that, I can't understand what they're saying. Beautiful!

The Horsemen mixed selections from their album, CANADADA, with new pieces, including a performance with the Honourable Rosenblatt of one of his poems. After a great deal of well-deserved applause, a couple of chants took place. One of them involved everyone repeating their telephone number to a three against four rhythm. "Think of it as a free exchange of information" said B.P. Nichol "with anyone you want to get in touch with." As well as their joint efforts, the Hoar Foursmen did solo efforts. All in all it was the most relaxed transmission of poetry to people York has hosted this year.

Bill Bisset, who also explores sounds in his work, will be reading on Feb. 26. He's one of our most original poets, and doesn't read in the east very often.