

Playmakers does 'Pygmalion'

By KAREN ROSEN
Staff Writer

"Who's ter know *Pygmalion* is anthing to do with flower girls?" asked Eliza Keefe, a 30-year-old flower girl who saw George Bernard Shaw's play in 1914.

"He might have called it *From Flower Girl to Duchess*," said Eliza. "We should have known what it was about then. Mister Shaw can have this tip from me, free, gratis and fer nuffin."

Shaw never took her advice, but Broadway and Hollywood set the story to music and called his Eliza *My Fair Lady*.

"The play is much more intriguing, evocative and provocative than *My Fair Lady*," said Gregory Boyd, director of *Pygmalion*, the Playmakers Repertory Company's season finale. The Shaw classic will run tonight through April 10 at 8 p.m. in Playmakers Theatre.

"It seemed appropriate to end the season with *Pygmalion*, being spring and everything," Boyd said. "It's a slightly sardonic romance."

The real *Pygmalion* was a sculptor and king of Cyprus in Greek legend who hated women, but fell in love with his own ivory statue of Aphrodite. The goddess was so touched by his prayers that she gave life to the statue and *Pygmalion* married his creation.

Douglas Johnson, a New York actor, writer, director and former Berkeley professor, injects life into Henry Higgins, who, in turn, molds Eliza Doolittle, a coarse cockney flower girl, into a lady Victorian society can accept. Kathryn Meisle, a first-year graduate student in the Master of Fine Arts acting program, takes the spunky Eliza through her rigorous training in phonetics and appearance. Meisle appeared on campus this year as Irina in *Three Sisters* and Iphigenia in *The Greeks*, and is the first student to secure a leading role in a PRC production.

Johnson left New York, where he had just finished directing *Back to Back*, a Vietnam comedy, to star as Higgins.

"Doug is the best director I know in the country," said Boyd, who worked with Johnson at the Berkeley Repertory Theatre in California. "The story of *Pygmalion* is in itself a theatricalized

metaphor. Higgins is the ultimate director, taking Eliza and transforming her personality. The requirement for an actor to play Higgins is a superb comic sense. The theatricality that a stage director would have makes Doug an exciting choice."

Playing Henry Higgins is a massive undertaking because the phonetics teacher never leaves the stage.

Johnson said, "He's one of the typical Shaw men. He has incredible mental capacity, unpredictableness and dynamic theatricality. Roles like that are very scarce."

The hardest part about playing Higgins? "Remembering the lines," Johnson said while sitting in Playmakers Theatre waiting for a technical rehearsal to begin.

Higgins is a well-meaning chap, but he is not the type to go to the pub with the boys. "I'm finding some kind of a balance in his character so he's not all cerebral, and making him approachable from an audience standpoint," Johnson said.

Johnson is a familiar face in television commercials. A recent sample of his promotional work includes appearing for Xerox typewriters, Howard Johnson's and Purolator. Of his many theatre-connected professions, Johnson prefers acting. He is usually a comic actor, and he won a Bay Area Theatre Critics Circle Award for *A Flea in Her Ear*.

"Acting's more immediate and exciting," he said. "Everything is right there in front of you and under control — supposedly. When you're writing, you're turning over your script, and when you're directing, you're watching someone else."

Boyd, who is also an actor, has no qualms about prowling the other side of the footlights for this play. "The actors are what's making it happen," he said. "I have to do very little because Shaw has written the play so completely. Most plays you have to conjure the sound from, but *Pygmalion* sounds so wonderful when it's spoken, one sits back and enjoys it during rehearsal instead of putting one's grubby fingerprints on it."

As vocal coach, Johanna Morrison, a guest artist at UNC and a former speech instructor at the N.C. School of the Arts, is responsible for much of the sound of the play. She also performs the dual roles of Mrs. Pearce and Mrs. Higgins, the professor's mother.



Photo by Jane Hambrory

Professor Henry Higgins is the chap who transforms Eliza Doolittle into a society animal ... Bernard Shaw's 'Pygmalion' will be at Playmakers Theatre tonight through April 10

"We exploit that aspect," Boyd said. "These are the two kinds of women who are able to run Higgins' life for him as he tries to run Eliza's."

"I think the audience will be surprised at how different the

climax of *Pygmalion* is as compared to *My Fair Lady*'s sentimental ending," Boyd said. "Shaw insists on a much more interesting and provocative ending."

And you don't mess around with Shaw.

If Purdy's or the Undergrad do not work,

look for a date in the *DTH* personals.



Jesse

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"The Democrats have longly and loudly gotten on to us for out-of-state campaigning, and now they're doing the same thing," he said.

Fetzer cited the campaign fund's out-of-state direct mail program and fund-raising dinners in New York and Atlanta.

Preyer said, "We can't meet the Congressional Club's outside money from within the state, so we have to get outside money too." David Flaherty, N.C. Republican Party chairman, said that the North Carolina Cam-

paign Fund's support was coming from international liberals such as John Rockefeller.


"They're going to expect something in return for their support that the people of North Carolina aren't bargaining for," he said.

Responding to assertions that Hunt was not connected with the campaign fund, Flaherty said, "If they think they can fool the public, they're underestimating the people of North Carolina. They're sure not raising money for Jesse."

Fetzer said that the original fund-raising letters the North Carolina Campaign Fund sent out "were so nasty that (former N.C. Sen.) Sam Ervin repudiated it and had his name removed. I think that speaks for the influence they may have in the state."

Preyer said that Ervin still supported the Campaign Fund. "There were several issues in the letter on which he had taken positions in the past on the other side, and it would appear inconsistent for his name to be on it," he said.

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