



John Tyson stars in Playmaker's 'Travesties' ...performances through April 1 in Paul Green

'Travesties' provides intelligent humor

Travesties is one of those plays that extends to its audience many invitations: the invitation to laugh, to be entertained, to think, and to want to know.

PlayMakers Repertory Company's current production focuses on the exile in Switzerland of four aesthetically incompatible men: the writer James Joyce, Lenin, the Dadaist poet Tristan Tzara and the unknown British consular official Henry Carr.

Travesties scathingly satirizes a production of Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* which historically brought the four together as well as the aesthetic theories which each proposes to be the definitive philosophical approach to art.

Henry Carr, now old and deranged, is the play's central character. John Tyson gives a feisty performance as the demented man. Tyson manifests Carr's confused and bent mind in his bent body and rope-tied robe and bowl hat. He delivers the monologues about Carr's "personal knowledge" of Lenin and Joyce in a raspy, throaty, Germanically guttural shout reminiscent of the late Jimmy Durante. Although his voice is rasping, his enunciation is precise; no one misses a word.

Tyson carries the energy of his speech over to his performance in general. One minute he is nearly crawling on the stage; the next, standing on a window seat, waving his arms and screaming for the fourth time "Lenin: A Sketch."

Even if the audience can not perform the mental aerobics necessary to keep up with all of Carr's allusions, Tyson's ranting and raving and expulsion of remarks such as "my art belongs to Dada" are enough to keep it rolling in the aisles.

Caspar Thomson portrays Carr's facially stoic butler, Bennet. Although cast in a minor role, Thomson gives a superb and noteworthy

Sheryl Thomas

Review

performance as the classic butler who is quietly exasperated by his mad master's ravings. When the script calls for Bennet to join in the nutty antics, though, Thomson is side-splittingly up to par. He retains the poker face but sends his body into gyrations that would cause the most aristocratic gentleman to gasp with laughter.

William Meisle and Nels Hennum portray the aesthetically polar James Joyce and Tristan Tzara. Their most engaging moment comes in their philosophical debate between Joyce's art for art's sake and Tzara's Dadaist stand of anti-art.

Meisle's Joyce is (to Tzara) exasperatingly unruffled and flippant, much as Joyce himself might have been. Hennum is oppositely hot-headed while trying to make a case for Tzara's illogical artistic theories.

As probably was actually the case, however, Joyce's logical cool wins the fray. Clothed and poised, he claims victory, icily saying to the pantsless Tzara, "You're an overexcited little man!"

Kieran Connolly sheds a humorous light on the development of Marxism in his clean, satiric portrayal of Lenin. His delivery of Lenin's speech in the second act, the longest speech by the character, is entertaining and enlightening.

Mona Neimiec, Nan Jeanette Seitz and Wendy B. Wilson give adequate performances as

Cecily, Gwendolen and Lenin's wife, Nadya. Except for Cecily's strip scene, the women's parts do not really lend themselves to character development or "acting," *per se*, as each spends more time delivering speeches on political history than interacting with others.

One of the best performers is *Travesties'* rotating stage platform. The set is basically the same as that of PlayMakers' previous production, *The Importance of Being Earnest*.

The upper platform has been transformed to include a rotating mid-section. Director Gregory Boyd uses this rotating platform to its fullest potential, having it bring in actors and sets like food on a smorgasboard.

Toward the end of the production, the platform swirls in a flashy set that's the whipped cream of this special dessert.

Thursday night's performance was not, however, without blemish. As technical crews had only two days to set up special lighting, projection, and sound effects, a few technical mishaps occurred. But all should be ironed out by now to provide future audiences with top-notch entertainment.

The play itself is very, very funny for those willing to pay attention to the aesthetics of the characters' disputes and the history of the sometimes lengthy political history lessons.

Travesties is not a play that caters to a passive audience, or an impatient one. The first act is lengthy, and during Thursday night's performance some restless couples got up and left.

But *Travesties* is a wonderful play for students, offering mental stimulation as well as side-splitting humor. As one person said at the play's end, if you don't understand the historical and literary allusions when you see the play, you'll want to go read and find out.

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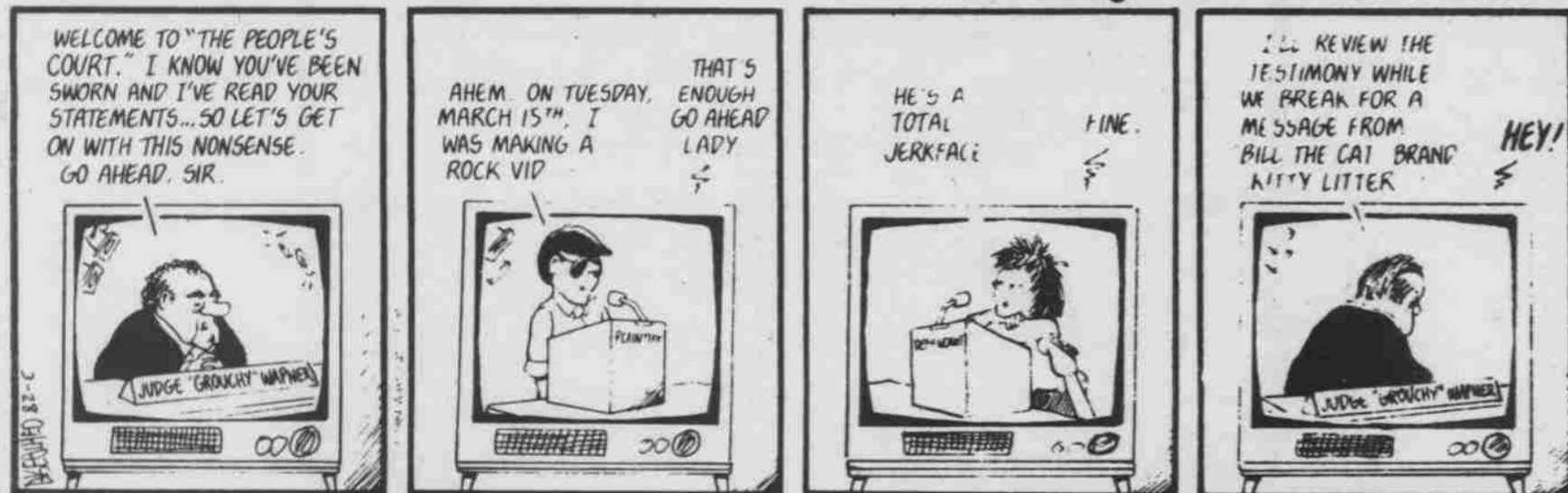
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