

Q Culture

Divas, dandies and doms take the stage

by Brian M. Myer
Q-Notes Staff

Charlotte Repertory Theatre has announced its 1999-2000 season, so here is the decidedly "pink" look at the plays and how they rate on our patented "Queer-O-Rama" meter.

The season opens with Alan Ayckbourn's *Communicating Doors*, September 10 through September 26. Set in a swanky hotel suite in 2018, 1998 and 1978, a leather-clad dominatrix-for-hire has been called in to provide one final good time for an ailing zillionaire, who, she soon finds out, has a fondness for killing his wives. Time travel ensues. If you're curious about the title, "communicating doors" are those pairs of doors that connect adjoining hotel rooms internally. During the course of the show, they fancifully become revolving doors into other decades.

The sheer quantity of Ayckbourn's plays (even though playwrighting is a second job for him, he's written over 50), not to mention his label as "commercial" in Britain, tempts one to dismiss the craftsmanship evident in his writing. He has an uncanny ability to take circumstances that would be complicated and clunky in other hands and make them play out easily. (We learn the ins and outs of time travel so casually, we feel we were experts all along.) Similarly, while others are called avant garde for writing complex plays that take structural risks, Ayckbourn tackles them with such facility he is considered mainstream.

Watch for clever direction by artistic director Steve Umberger and hope for an energetic cast with the prerequisite timing to pull off Ayckbourn's dialogue. Queer-O-Rama rating: 4. Entertainment potential: 8.

Song, dance and music fill the stage for an inspired look at the best of the 1920's and 30's 'Blackbird Revues' that dazzled Harlem, Paris and Broadway. This extremely popular entertainment spawned such stars as Lena Horne, Josephine Baker, Ethel Waters, the Berry Brothers, Bill "Bojangles" Robinson, and such musical talents as Duke Ellington, Count Basie and Cab Calloway.

Revisiting the success of such questionable war horses as *The 1940's Radio Hour* and *Swingtime Cantine*, the Rep teams with Arkansas Rep (Little Rock, AR), Mill Mountain Theatre (Roanoke, VA), Barter Theatre (Abingdon,

Theatre

Art

Music

Dance

Film

VA), Theatre IV (Richmond, VA) and Victoria Theatre (Dayton, OH) to bring *Blackbirds of Broadway: A Harlem Rhapsody* to life October 6 through 17. Queer-O-Rama rating: 4. Entertainment potential: 6.

In what might be considered a parting shot at the gone-but-not-forgotten Gang of Five, the Rep brings Oscar Wilde to the stage and to the stand November 5 through 21.

Gross Indecency: The Three Trials of Oscar Wilde is a most unusual theatre experience. It is essentially a docudrama: a recreation (abridged) of the three trials of Oscar Wilde, just as the title indicates. The first trial occupies the show's first act. Here Wilde, at the peak of his fame (*An Ideal Husband* and *The Importance of Being Earnest* are both West End hits) sues the Marquess of Queensbury for libel; Queensbury, the estranged father of Wilde's "very dear friend" (read: sex buddy) Lord Alfred Douglas, has left a card at Wilde's club on which he calls Wilde a "posing Sodomite (sic)."

It becomes clear rather quickly that Wilde's lawsuit is ill-advised and things turn disastrous almost immediately. Based on evidence provided by some young men who had spent incriminating nights with Wilde, he is arrested and stands trial himself for "gross indecency," i.e., performing homosexual acts. When the jury can't decide on a verdict, there is a third trial; these two trials make up the long second act of this play.

This is a provocative work, one that raises issues of censorship, the role of art (and of the artist) in society, and homophobia. As an epilogue for *Angels in America*, however, it tends more toward education than entertainment. Queer-O-Rama rating: 10. Entertainment potential: 7.

You don't pick a show like *Tru* without having already cast it. Let's hope the lucky actor who gets this plumb role, December 1 through 12, is up to the challenge. This one-man tour-de-force is completely in his hands. Without superb acting and above-average direction, this amazing piece of theatre is transformed into an interminable evening of schlock, whining and boredom.

It is the week before Christmas, and the gregarious Truman Capote is smarting under an exile to which he has sentenced himself. With the printing of a chapter of his unfinished *Answered Prayers*, he has revealed too many of the secrets of the rich and powerful socialites who kept him as a spoiled pet and he has been banished from both their favor and their largesse. Abandoned by those friends, his isolation is further exacerbated by the absence of long-time companions and lovers, not to mention the alcohol he loves, leaving him with only the walls — and his audience — as company. What ensues is a two-hour monologue culled from Capote's words and works, dripping with rich and bitchy Capote humor and a fair bit of in-

sight, for all that it's pure fiction in the final analysis. Queer-O-Rama rating: 10. Entertainment potential: 9.

The world premier of the 1998 New Play Festival graduate, *The Deer and the Antelope Play* takes the stage January 26 through February 6. Three generations of women in east Texas face tragedy and assorted misfortunes with the help of a strange young woman who comes to live with them — a free-spirit who defines herself as one "who drinks from the well of life in big gulps." Queer-O-Rama rating: ?, Entertainment potential: ?

From the same pen that created *Four Dogs and a Bone* and the film *Moonstruck*, John Patrick Shanley's *Psychopathia Sexualis* is an off-the-wall excursion into the land of strange fetishes, bedroom politics, and some half-serious (though fully coherent) ideological sparring between Jung and Freud, with John Wayne thrown into the ring to take their measure.

Terry Loughlin directs this comedy that takes an amusing look at friendship, courtship, psychoanalysis and the lies we tell each other in the name of honesty and the truth. Queer-O-Rama rating: 4. Entertainment potential: 7.

The Beauty Queen of Leenane has emerged as one of last season's most acclaimed new plays: reviews to die for, scads of accolades and awards, and the potential for long lines at the box office. The question is not "Is it good?" but rather "Is it really that good?"

Martin McDonagh is unquestionably a talented young writer: he has a positive flair for the poetry of everyday conversation, a strong and sure sense of plot and incident, and a knack for creating lovable characters against rather sizable odds. Putting all of this to good use, he has created in *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* a skillful diversion about a mother and daughter who live to drive one another crazy. It's entertaining, even crowd-pleasing, but it also has a tendency toward being calculated and regrettably empty: this is more soap opera, than play, and there's nothing to be gleaned here about the human condition or the human heart.

What will keep this production afloat will be a stellar cast and even more stellar direction (by a guest director not yet announced.) Keep your fingers crossed from April 5 to April 16. Queer-O-Rama rating: 6 (for Mag, the dominating maternal character alone). Entertainment potential: 7.

From May 5 through May 21, Charlotte Rep will introduce you to a truly extraordinary woman.

Meet Alexa Vere De Vere: agent, sometime actress and all-around Fabulous Person. She's a sexy, sophisticated and smart amalgamation of Sally Bowles, Holly Golightly and Auntie Mame, with a touch of Tallulah thrown in for good measure. Alexa swoops into the life of a young novelist named Evan Wyler and immediately transforms him from an earnest but

struggling artist into a suave and savvy player, exactly the right man to pen the screenplay of her life.

Evan falls in love with Alexa, which is slightly surprising given the fact that he's gay. They're just about to go to Hollywood to clinch the movie deal at Paramount or maybe Warner Brothers, when suddenly...Alexa disappears. Evan is left holding the bag, so to speak, which in this case consists of several thousand dollars worth of credit card debt (Alexa never seems to have any money on her), a disgruntled rock band and a gnawing feeling that is equal parts betrayal and bewilderment.

That's just the first act of *As Bees in Honey Drown* by Douglas Carter Beane. This first act is clever and stylish and hilarious; the good news is that the second act tops it masterfully. (You'll have to see it for yourself to find out what happens, but I will tell you that Beane has some nifty surprises for you.) On one level, *Bees* is a satire of a society whose values seem based primarily on brand-name recognition. But it's also a morality play — albeit an extremely funny one — musing on what happens when we seek fame instead of our fortune, with the answer provided by the title.

But there's still another level to *Bees*, for this is a marvelous character study as much a valentine to Alexa as *I Am a Camera* is to Sally Bowles or *Breakfast at Tiffany's* is to Holly Golightly. And Alexa deserves it; she's a terrific character, one of the best roles written for a woman in years (evidenced by the rush of female movie stars, including Madonna, to play her on film). Her credo is self-invention and she has a wondrous capacity for it; her modus operandi is to live for the minute which she does with passion and flair.

All things being equal, this is the one not to miss! Queer-O-Rama rating: 10. Entertainment potential: 10. ▼

Pride '99 sets tentative plans

GREENSBORO, NC—Festivities to celebrate pride in North Carolina will take place in Greensboro over the weekend of June 11 - 13 with the theme "Celebrating North Carolina's End of the Century." A variety of activities, in addition to the standard march and rally, have been planned. The tentative schedule for the weekend is as follows:

Friday, June 11

Welcoming Ceremonies 6:00 - 8:00pm at the host hotel, the Greensboro Hilton. Meet the Pride Board of Directors and the '99 Pride Organizing Staff. Sponsored by: NC Pride '99 & Power Of One

GLBT Variety Show for Pride 8:00 - 10:00pm. If interested in performing, call Heather at (336) 274-0721. Hosted by Ms NC Pride '99.

Welcoming Celebration at the Greensboro clubs: warehouse 29, The Palms and Babylon.

Saturday, June 12

Workshops/Vending 9:00am-3:00pm at the Hilton. Call Deb at (338) 273-5746 for more information on vending.

Celebrity Auction 11:00am - 2:30pm at the Hilton. Sponsored by: Men of All Colors Together.

Picnic in the Park/Volleyball Tournament 12:00 - 5:00pm at Linsey Park. Sponsored by warehouse 29 & MCC-Greensboro.

Pride Dinner at Cafe Pasta 5:00pm - 7:30pm. Sponsored by Cafe Pasta.

Triad Pride Men's Chorus Concert 8:00 - 10:00pm. Tickets are \$12/\$10 for seniors and children. Sponsored by Triad Pride Men's Chorus.

Party at Babylon, The Palms, MCC-Greensboro, Club Odyssey and warehouse 29.

Sunday, June 13


Rally/Vending 12:00 - 5:00pm McDonald Plaza. Call Deb at (338) 273-5746 for more information on vending.

March 1:30 - 2:45pm in downtown Greensboro. If interested in marching as a group, call the toll-free Pride Line.

Party At 5 5:00-8:00pm McDonald Plaza. Sponsored by Babylon & NC Pride '99.

For more information on the above, contact the Pride Line (toll free) 1-877-774-3362 or (336) 855-3725 in Greensboro. ▼

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