Theatre... Dramashop Production Is Excellent

By Richard Hornby

It is unfortunate that this review comes out after Eugene Ionesco's Amedee, or How to Get Rid of It, Dramashop's major spring production, has closed. To those of you who didn't go, I can only say that you have missed an outstanding evening of theatre.

From the first act, it is Ionesco at his best. The bizarre is held to a minimum, making it more graphic and effective. We see an extremely dull, ordinary, middle-class couple in their apartment (he is writing something while she is cleaning). Gradually we notice some oddities. Mushrooms grow in the living room. Amedee and his wife Madeleine have not left the apartment for fifteen years—they even haul in their food through the window in a basket. Amedee turns out to be a writer of "social realism" plays, yet he is completely cut off from the world, while his wife has contact with the outside only through a weird job operating a switchboard in the living room. And one more little thing: there is a corpse growing in the bedroom.

By the end of the first act the corpse has grown so large that it is feet (about four feet) high and burnt into the living room. In the second act, Amedee and Madeleine in a series of discussions and arguments give clues as to what the corpse might be—perhaps the body of a young man who came to call fifteen years ago whom Amedee perhaps killed in a fit of jealousy, or perhaps the corpse of a baby that a neighbor once left with them. In a dream sequence Amedee and Madeleine appear as a newly-married couple. We learn that Amedee was once loving and romantic but that Madeleine killed his affection right from the start. Through a series of speeches full of sexual images (Madeleine cries "You're voice is so piercing. Don't hurt me. Soddi. Soddi!" etc.) we hear how she rejected his love. Gradually we are made to realize that the corpse stands for their dead love, poisoning their lives, growing as they grew, leaping around from functioning as an artist or a human being.

At the end of the second act Amedee and his wife have decided to get rid of the corpse; they drag it through the living room, onto the balcony, and outside (it is a good thirty feet long). Then, in the last act, when they come out of the house, the town changes completely, and has become a horrible nightmare is now a pleasant dream. In the town square, where Amedee and Madeleine, the corpse, the atmosphere is exploratory. Suddenly an odd, most of the people are pleasantly drunk or half asleep; gendarmes dressed as Keystone Cops. For the first time Amedee is able to establish contact with other human beings (he engages in a French lesson with an amiable American soldier); he becomes so ecstatic that he literally flies away, while the townspeople smile, wave, and call to him. Madeleine wants him to come back (the mushrooms are in bloom), but their deadly relationship is over: music plays in the background, the corpse floats away, babbling happily of "social realism!"

If the play has a flaw, it is the second act. There the play becomes verbal rather than theatrically. The long discussions might have interesting connotations on the play as a whole, but they cannot compare with the solid reality of these huge feet sticking out of the bedroom. In becoming specific, the unifying image of the corpse actually loses meaning. Furthermore, the atmosphere is much more well-played by Roger Gans and Solina. Amedee, encapsulated as a walking symbols. This might be all right, say, in a novel, but for such a scene to be theatrical it should show, albeit bizarrely or surreally, young Amedee and Madeleine as human beings. But it is a wonderful production. Even in the second act my attention never wavered. If it does, it is usually a good sign that something isn't happening on stage that should be. The direction of Joseph Everingham, the cast is a perfect ensemble; each part no matter how small is clearly and imaginatively portrayed. The actors are relaxed; they relate to each other and they enjoy themselves. As Amedee and Madeleine, directed by Joseph Everingham and Joan Taitone are indescribably good. As a result of acting together in Dramashop for many years, they work beautifully with each other. They give characterizations that are simple, honest, and size: they show great imagination and endless variety without ever stooping to cheap tricks or staring for obvious effect that would be the temptation (and ruination) of most dramatic efforts.

Sets by James Dorr and Lighting by Lawrence Valley are excellent. In particular they succeed in giving illusions of space on a very small stage. The many difficult technical effects are handsomely done on a stage poorly equipped or designed to do them.

Three cheers for Dramashop! By all means go to their next production in the fall.

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"Tareyton's Dual Filter in duos partes divisa est!" says veteran coach Romulus (Uncle) Remus. "We have a saying over at the Coliseum—Tareyton separates the gladiators from the gladiolus!" It's a real magnus smoke. Take it from me, Tareyton delivers de gustibus—and the Dual Filter does it!"