The Three-penny Opera

"The Three-penny Opera" is generally considered one of Bertolt Brecht's masterpieces. The MIT Gilbert and Sullivan Society will present the production of this work in KemenAuditorium on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday of this week. Brecht was unquestionably one of the most significant of the modern theatre, and in this work he has blended several of the greatest number of his theories on the role of the modern theatre. He has done so in great measure in the relationship between the actor and audience. Brecht based the play on John Gay's Restoration comedy, "The Beggar's Opera" which followed the adventures of the bandit Macheath, a swashbuckling English Don Juan. However, in contrast to Gay's light treatment of the sins of the London underworld, Brecht used this setting to bring out the ugly and brutal consequences of a social structure which breeds such vices. Brecht, like his bandits, whoever they beggar is misdirected and bitter victims of a social system which is not only materially valuable and in which even human feelings and virtues are useful only as saleable goods.

The brilliant music of Kurt Weill's accompanying score accentuates the irony and bitterness of Brecht's view of society, as seen in such songs as Mack the Knife and Pirate Jenny. Both from the show, have become independent and famous and they are greatly enhanced by their context in the play.

Brecht frequently lets his actors address the audience directly to let them know that he has no answers, but it is possible for the scenes they witness in this beggar's underworld. But as harsh as Brecht can be, he is never devoid of immense compassion for all his characters as well as his audience, and never does the author lose his refreshing sense of humor as he views the society with stinging irony.

The relevance of Brecht's work to our present society is astounding; perhaps even a little disturbing in the very fact that the complaints Brecht levelled at the governments of the twentieth century will apply full force to us as we open our eyes at the least.

In their production, the G&S Society is doing the show in nineteenth century costumes to accentuate the fact that while Brecht found the examples of the social ills he echoed a century before his time in Victorian England, we, a half century later the first product of "The Threepenny Opera, will still struggle with similar social ills.

paperback:
The Indochina Story
By Bruce Schwartz
The Indochina story is an epic and historic tragedy, a tale of three continents, years in the making, and millions of dollars produced at a cost beyond calculation. For the treasure, ineradicable, is ongoing, ongoing...

It is an old story by now. When the Committee of Concerned Asian Scholars, in Philadelphia in 1968, the Vietnam phase of the Indochina War was already under way, and produced a book called "The Indochina Story" and released it with fall. But it won't do much good.

There is nothing new in the "The Indochina Story. Those who know much about the subject or who have followed Noam Chomsky over the years will be unimpressed by the 347-page volume. Fourteen pages contain nothing but footnotes; the story, it is, advertised, "fully documented," drawn upon the findings of dozens of scholars and journalists, quoting spokesman from within the governments of the United States, both Vietnams, Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia. The documentation is intended to make the arguments of CCAS as convincing and forceful as possible, for the only obvious purpose of the book is to show the solution put forth in the final pages: complete and immediate withdrawal.

The book is divided into four parts. The first goes far into the past to provide a historical perspective to the present situation. This section delves into the character of the French empire, the rise of the Viet Minh, the height of the Second World War, the return of the French, Dien Bien Phu, the Geneva agreements, Dien, US intervention. The same procedure is followed in the analysis of Laos, Cambodia, and Thailand.

The second section, entitled "How is the United States Fighting in Vietnam?" deduces 15 chapters which form the call "The Indochina Story and released it with fall. But it won't do much good.

All of this is recounted merely to establish a factual background to the Indochina Story and released it with fall. But it won't do much good.

Finally, after three relatively undistinguished albums Eric Clapton has returned. Arrived with a new group and better material. Layla is perhaps his most distinguished production to date. The album is characterized by changing style which is much more structured than the free-form guitar leads that were so integral a part of Cream, and some surprisingly good lead vocals, too.

The album is a composite of tight blues and strong rock. Clapton is given excellent backup performances by Carl Radle, Al Kooper, and Nicky Hopkins. Allman Brothers collaborates on several leads. (Allman has unfortunately received very little publicity; hopefully, this, and the release of his own band's album will rectify that. Enough tracks on Layla are particularly interesting, being Clapton's first return to blues since John Mayall.

The double-album has 14 tracks, about equally divided between acoustic and electric. Layla does the vocals for all the songs, with occasional help from Whitlock, and they're the best he's done since the days of Crossroads and Spoonful. As a whole, there is a much quieter sound with much less volume than is current, and correspondingly much more depth. The leads, particularly on the third side, are structured with melodic riffs which make for nice, catchy, easy to listen to tracks that have much more depth than a first runthrough reveals. (Also, catchy melodies are notably stable.) By the second or third time through, however, the intricacies of Clapton and Allman's jams becomes more evident, and the album starts to gain credibility as a major step towards the recovery of rock music.

Rock is really suffering from a lack of good material; this is the first notable release since Neil Young's "After the Gold Rush." There have been varied explanations and excuses for this, but few record companies have felt compelled to address the truth: there is a dearth of good talent, and an even greater shortage of real artists; consequently, recordings are being rushed, and quality is dropping. The major record companies seem to have very little knowledge of their public's desires, and seems to use some sort of haphazard selection process for determining who and what gets the publicity hype. Most of the time, they're wrong.

As a result of this lack of artistry, the good groups are forced to take up the slack, and industry pressure does not allow groups much material. The volume of output of the recording industry has not increased in comparison to the other arts; this fact is, of course, purely coincidental. The increase in the musical quality of the average rock release is so bad that wait- ing for the good stuff is sort of like looking for pearls in oysters: you have to work at it, but you can get awfully sick on the wait.

However, perseverance has its rewards, and occasionally the records are enough to justify the wait. Layla is the first album in a very long time to satisfy that statement.

—Rob Hunter

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