

arts

Theatre vs. circus: searching for the line

Can American writers produce theatre which is relevant to the average American?

The Department of Humanities tried to answer this question Wednesday when it presented "American Drama and American History: Explorations," a seminar featuring an afternoon discussion with playwright Arthur Kopit and an evening performance of *Calvin Coolidge Follies* by the Newbury Street Theatre.

Kopit, the author of several well known plays including the recently filmed *Indians* maintains in his latest work, *Lewis and Clarke*, that there should be no boundaries between stage and audience, or between actors and viewers. *Lewis and Clark's* "stage" consisted of a football field full of different platforms, enabling the audience to join in the play as they walked around, under, and on the platforms.

Multistage and interactive theater is not a new concept. The latest Broadway production of *Candide* uses 18 different playing spaces, and plays as old as *The*

Skin of Our Teeth relied for effect upon audience participation. But the new and innovative part of Kopit's work is to combine the two, presenting the show in a circus-like manner, juggling scenes and sequences.

This type of theater presents a great deal of problems for the actors. In the first place, it can be difficult to tell the actors from the audience. A lot of standard acting devices go out the window. Punches can't be pulled in a fight where the crowd is a foot away from the fighters, but people with good gymnastic training and a highly developed skill and timing can "fight" each other over a distance of twenty or thirty yards.

The basic problem with this new theatrical technique is that the lack of temporal cohesiveness makes it difficult to handle. Is it possible to have drama and not a circus side show when there is no clear cut temporal arrangement of scenes? Arthur Kopit, his actors, and a lot of people in Connecticut seem to think so; Boston may have a chance to see his work

this coming summer in City Hall Plaza.

Following Kopit's talk, the Newbury Street Theatre performed *The Calvin Coolidge Follies* in a mediocre fashion. The play, an adaptation of Geoffrey Bush's biography of President Coolidge, was excellent *per se*; cohesive and well written, it was funny enough to keep the audience's attention riveted to the stage; unfortunately, the actors have not produced the play since last summer. No lines were muffed, but Lee Cooke Cal-

vin's wife as Grace, walked through her part almost totally devoid of any style. Roy Wilson and Debra Abramhoff had a few fine moments in their humorous small roles, but the rest of the cast were out of touch with their parts.

Can American dramatists produce American theatre for the American people? Arthur Kopit and Geoffrey Bush are trying.

— William Schaffner.



Roy Wilson, of the Calvin Coolidge Follies

Wordless show not lifeless

The Spectrum Performing Arts Series is designed to bring professional-quality theatre and concert music to people who can't afford the prices of downtown theaters. The second of this season's Spectrum performances by the National Mime Theatre at Kresge Little Theatre showed the success of the Spectrum formula, as this company is one of the best in the United States.

Mime is the art of theatre without words. A few simple props and movement are used to develop the plots and characters. Costumes are white tights, the mimes are in whiteface, and every motion on stage must be directly involved with the development of the skit.

The National Mime Theatre show, "Beyond Words," was performed by Kenyon Martin, the artistic director of the company, and Drucilla Markle. Composed of a dozen skits designed to show the versatility of the actors, the show also spotlighted the range of subjects mime

can cover. The opening skit, for example, was concerned with an office worker who goes to lunch in a nearby park — a seemingly trivial topic, which was fresh and interesting when handled with a technique that exposes every nuance of movement to the viewer.

By far the best performance was that of Kenyon Martin in "Street Clown," where he mimed juggling, weight lifting, and tight-rope walking in one of the finest mime demonstrations seen recently in Boston.

Unfortunately, the show was seen by only a few people; the 4pm show played to less than half of the Little Theatre's small capacity. For a \$2 show on a Sunday afternoon, this is a poor turnout. So — just in case bad publicity was the problem — the next MIT Spectrum concert feature will feature the Musica Orbis Company at 7:30pm Friday, Nov. 21 in the Sala.

A 'fun' musical: Celebration



Another "pure entertainment" musical by Schmidt and Jones — the people who brought you *The Fantasticks* — opens tonight in Kresge for a two-weekend run as the MIT Musical Theatre Guild performs *Celebration*. One of the last of the old "formula musicals," with the familiar boy-meets-girl, boy-loses-girl, boy-gets-girl plot, *Celebration* is full of fun — and little else. The emphasis is on the "ritual" nature of the show, as actors parade on a huge platform stage a continuous pageant of color which embellishes an almost-nonexistent plot. The music is good, if

not memorable, and the choreography ought to gladden anyone who saw the MTG's *The Fantasticks* earlier this fall.

MTG's *Celebration* is directed by Norman Nuber, who played Higgins in *My Fair Lady* for the company last fall, and produced by Brian Rehrig, with music direction by Tom Gilligan, who doubles up to play Mr. Rich. The show will be performed tonight and tomorrow night, and Thursday, Friday and Saturday of next week.

"Some people say that today is the day when the winds will rise and blow the

world away," the opening song starts out. If you're in the audience, you'll probably be having too much fun to care.

— William Schaffner

Photos by Gordon Haff

