
The Boston Shakespeare Company is the stronghold of classical theatre in the Boston metropolitan area. Their productions of such Shakespearean classics as King Lear and Romeo and Juliet have all been richly rewarding adaptations of Shakespeare to the modern stage. This season, in addition to their classical performances they are also offering a modern play to fill out their repertoire. This fall's selection is William Saroyan's The Time of Your Life, a slow-moving play that struggles to arrive at an understanding of twentieth century man.

Nearly all of the action in The Time of Your Life is set in Nick's bar, a cheap dive in a seedy section of New York City in the autumn of 1938. There is no obvious plot or conflict in the play; instead, Saroyan focuses on a series of stories built around the people who frequent the bar. Thus the audience is introduced to Joe, an easy-going dandy who never works, always succeeds, and yet secretly hates himself. A going dandy who never works, always succeeds, and yet secretly hates himself. A man who is lost in love for his idol Elsie. Nick, the owner of the bar, is a typical small businessman who only wants his business to flourish and be left alone. The personalities of these characters are revealed not through any sort of action, but rather through a series of story-like sessions over mugs of beer at Nick's tables.

Perhaps the most illustrious character in the BSC's production is Kit Carson, an adventure-trapper with a flair for spontaneously conjuring tales of personal adventures to fix any situation. Carson is portrayed by Will Lebow, an extraordinarily talented man who is the finest actor in the BSC. The stage comes to life when Lebow bounds down the stairs of the bar and begins telling his bull stories. His high energy acting holds the audience spell-bound and dominates the scenes in which he is present. Lebow's performance picks up the play and gives it virtually all of its few high points.

The remainder of the characters in the play are rather lifeless and uninteresting, despite the occasional profound statements that they try to make about men. Virtually no character development takes place over the course of events in the play. The result is a patchwork of stories and people that never manages to coalesce into any kind of unified whole.

William Saroyan was a deeply thoughtful man who wrote The Time of Your Life as a commentary on society than an entertaining play. The cardboard characters of the play thus become symbols of the different types of people that are caught up in today's world. He believed that modern man is ensnared by society, and it is obvious in the play where he tries to make his point. A common denominator of the best of characters is that they hate their lot in life. Underneath their outer shell they despise the paths that their lives have taken, yet they believe that they are powerless to change directions. Saroyan then launches into a lengthy dissertation on just how his characters try to function in their predicament, working his commentary into the conversations that take place in the bar. Eventually everything comes to a head when one of the policemen starts haranguing Kitty Duval for being a whore. The resulting action is supposed to show how weak and helpless all of the characters are, but the point is lost in the confusing muddle at the end of the play.

Thus most of the weaknesses inherent in the play can be traced to its author. The BSC does make a worthy effort to pull the play together. The set is excellently done, and many of the scenes taken apart contain highly amusing situations and anecdotes that are well executed. But the play never really jells, and when the lights finally go back on, one is left with a feeling of confusion and faint amusement. The profound message can be sensed, but it never comes across in a powerful, meaningful way.

Perhaps the BSC should risk a narrower audience and try to produce plays that are more liveable. After all, Saroyan was a deeply meaningful man. As he said, 'One of the most important things in life is to know when to stop.'

The Time of Your Life. A deep meaning is there, but it is a tedious task to pull it out of the play.

- Joseph Kristl

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on the town

Theatre

Tom Stoppard's one of the world's leading contemporary playwrights, will be in Boston Wednesday, November 21 to launch one of The Best British Short Plays. Stoppard will also be signing a limited edition of his own Dogg's Hamlet, Cohain's Macbeth. The MIT Shakespeare Ensemble presents ten scenes from American playwrights including Eugene O'Neill, Tennessee Williams, Edward Albee, and Woody Allen. Performances are November 29 & 30, and December 30 at 8 pm, room 66-110. Admission is free with a discussion afterwards.

Movies

And Then There Were None, the Midnite Movie, Saturday, November 24, second floor of the Student Center.

Antique Jars

Warehouse Sale, Sundays, 10:30 am—2:30 pm, Nov. 28

Fine handblown scientific display jars from Harvard museum are mostly 50% off original prices. Most are over 100 years old and range in size from 2½ to 3 high. 29 Franklin Street, Central Square, Cambridge or call 354-0892 Sundays

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The Time of Your Life dies a slow death

arts