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## THEATRE

### FROM THE OREGON SHAKESPEAREAN FESTIVAL IN ASHLAND: REVIEWS BY DOROTHY VELASCO

#### *She Stoops to Conquer*

When Oliver Goldsmith wrote *She Stoops to Conquer* in 1773, he deliberately set out to write what he called a "laughing comedy," as opposed to the overwhelmingly popular "sentimental comedies" of the day, which allowed for the shedding of tears.

There are no tears shed at the Ashland production of *She Stoops to Conquer*, which is performed in the boisterous style of Hogarth drawings. In fact, the actors often freeze in dramatic poses while one character delivers a brief monologue.

The plot hinges upon the tried and true device of mistaken identity. Squire Hardcastle and his family live in a country mansion that looks like an inn. The handsome but timid son of the Squire's best friend is expected to court the Squire's pretty daughter Kate, whom he has never met. When the suitor mistakes his prospective father-in-law for an innkeeper, and Kate for a barmaid, the confusion mounts, to the delight of the audience.

The production, directed by Walter Shoen of the Arizona Theatre Company, is a thoroughly enjoyable hit. However, a few details could be improved, and undoubtedly will be, during the course of the long run. The frozen poses could begin and end more sharply, with more exaggerated positions. The pace could be a bit faster, and a little more comic business added. Although the young would-be lovers, played by Michelle Morain and Chiron Alston, are charming and attractive, the actors might find a little more humor in their roles.

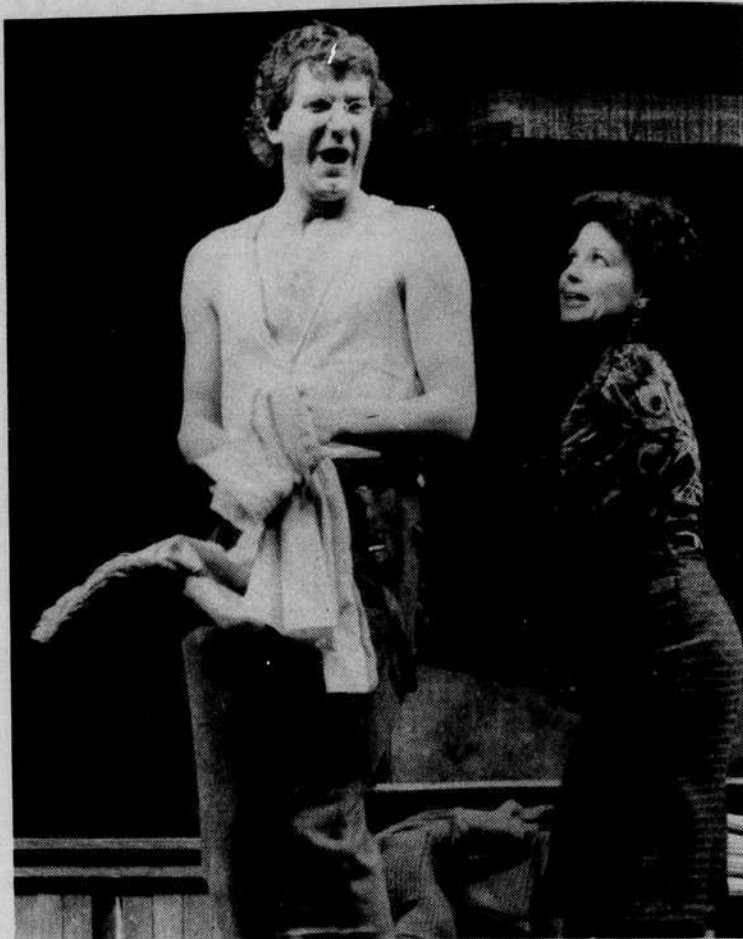
But the deficiencies are minor. William McKereghan is at his best as the portly, ill-used Squire, and Caren Graham as his wife storms around the stage like a ribbon-decked inflatable boat. Robert Sicular as the trickster, Tony Lumpkin, even manages to look considerably smaller than he does as Henry in *Richard II*.

Although many of Ashland's regular actors are missing this season, it's a pleasure to see Eugene actor Bill Ritchie working his way up into larger speaking roles. He is quite enjoyable here as a bumbling servant.

Not to belittle the actors, but some of the most entertaining moments are provided by the set changes. Richard L. Hay has created an enormous fairy-tale set, which breaks into parts that the actors turn about and reposition like the pieces of a puzzle. It's a marvel of engineering, and the set changes invariably provoke applause. For a garden scene a cupid statue unexpectedly rises from the floor, and later even the fathers, spying on their offspring, rise from a hiding place behind the statue.

The gorgeous costumes by Jeanie Davidson are equally impressive, making an appropriate statement about each character. Mrs. Hardcastle's garish dresses are as wide as she is tall.

*She Stoops to Conquer* is good natured entertainment. As Squire Hardcastle says, he likes old things—old wine, old fashions, even his old wife. In this case it's also easy to like old plays.



PHOTOGRAPH BY CHRISTOPHER BRISCOE

Brad Moniz as Mr. Mulleady and Penny Metropulos as Meg in *The Hostage* by Brendan Behan, in Angus Bowmer Theatre.

#### *The Hostage*

There are always excellent productions at Ashland, but once every few years a very special production comes along that causes the others to pale by comparison. If you don't have a ticket yet for *The Hostage*, performed this season at Ashland, you'd better buy one right away. Those tickets will be scarcer than leprechauns now that the word is out.

The Oregon Shakespearean Festival's production of Brendan Behan's tragic farce is the liveliest, bawdiest, most vigorous, profane, rollicking theatrical experience in Ashland during the past several years. It's quite possible that there isn't a better current production of any play anywhere in this country.

Both the play and the production deserve every rave they receive. Director Michael Kevin has guided a large cast and four musicians through a three-hour tour de force. The language is a rich and rowdy spoken symphony. Every Irish song you've ever heard is included here, often with rewritten, political lyrics.

Everyone is funny, everyone is bursting with tremendous life. *The Hostage* has the power to make you laugh and cry at the same time, because life in this Dublin brothel in 1960 is so ironically awful that the only sane response is laughter.

The plot, which hardly begins until the second act because so much atmosphere is packed into the first, involves the kidnapping of a young English soldier by the IRA. The hope is that his life can be traded for that of a young Irishman convicted of murder. Held hostage in the brothel, the English soldier falls in love with a sweet Irish servant, and is the object of

various strange attentions by the rest of the inhabitants.

A few minor quibbles. Some of the songs in the first act could be cut to get on with the story. Performing the play as a two-act instead of a three-act would also help.

But how we love these characters—these brave, tender, petty, all-too-human specimens finding their own particular ways to survive. Douglas Markkanen is the central force of the micro-cosmic world created on stage. As Pat, a scruffy old IRA patriot and owner of the brothel, he is Irish clear down to his aching bones. Penny Metropulos is the salt of the earth as Meg, his almost wife. Her singing is spine-tingling and her strength radiates to the rafters.

The entire cast is outstanding, but most noteworthy are Demetra Pittman as the love-starved religious fanatic Miss Gilchrist, Brad Moniz as Mulleady, the object of her desire, and John Stadelman as Rio Rita. Ursula Meyer and Dante DiLoreto are charming and touching as the servant and the soldier.

The action occurs on a splendid three-level set by William Bloodgood, with spectacular lighting by Robert Peterson.

Brendan Behan, who drank himself to death at 41, is universally irreverent in *The Hostage*. No one is spared—drunks, teetotalers, gays—but on the other hand no one is condemned. There is criticism, but tolerance for all. We can try to change the world, but will it ever improve? Who knows. Meanwhile, grab a stout, sing a song, and keep hoping for a better day.

[Dorothy Velasco's reviews can be heard on "The Ashland Report" produced by D. Roberts and airing on KLCC-FM's "Morning Edition" and "Sunday Morning" programs.]