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**BIRDS READ THE
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Carnival Theatre's first

'Habeas Corpus' delightful

By JOHN LOEBER
Of the Emerald

Much applause for Carnival Theatre: a summer of theater to a delightful start with Alan Bennett's "Habeas Corpus," a carefully-tuned romp through everyone's mores and morals: a must for young children and old citizens. And quite cathartic for all in-between.

The title of this play stirs thoughts of Agatha Christie and Mickey Spillane, to be sure. Yet only sidles them through its broader moments. A middling physician (-aged, -bulged, sexed and reputed), stonewall wife, friends and family caught in the throes of carnal lust; all trying alternately to hide and unclothe their bodies as they scamper willy-nilly through his surgery. A synopsis of the play is obviated by a list of characters, amongst whom: Canon Throbbing, Felicity Rumpers, and Sir Percy Shorter.

Suffice it that as the writ says, we shall have the body: groped, fondled, and titillated.

The title's true story is most easily seen in the set designed by Jerry Williams. Simple, bold, straightforward. There is nothing

review

unnecessary and all that is, is there. The simplicity hearkens the basis of theater: players and audience, and is an admirable statement of functional aesthetics: a flat-appearing horizontal design of growing colors (yellows and oranges) which are revealed by the passing motion of actors to be

multi-surfaced. The only furniture being a few chairs and stools. An entirely apt setting for the clowning in which director Lou Salerni presents the characters.

Clowning is the key to this production, such as found in Chaplin. Accolades bound readily for Wayne Bailantyne, as the physician, and Gwen Jackson, as Mrs. Swabb the maid, who as mistress of ceremonies holds all together. They truly live up to expectations. The only disappointments are found in the roles given by Jacquie McClure as the wife, B. Dilaconi as Lady Rumpers, and Steve Pickens as Sir Percy. McClure never shows whether she even likes her character, possibly from laziness, and Pickens merely presents a characterization he often trundles forth for University Theatre productions, possibly his personality. Dilaconi is just brief. Together they almost kill the second act, but are outshadowed by generally fine performances from the rest of the cast, and an especially fine job by P. Dandridge Brown who shows a fine ability to be dowdy as Constance Wickstead.

Alan Bennett has said, "We (mostly) go to the theatre wanting to be told only what we know already." Possibly there is so much comedy in this play as to leave it at that. For me, though, there was more said about touching and feelings.

"Habeas Corpus" plays Thursday, Friday and Saturday at 8:30 p.m. for \$3, \$1 off for University students.



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The Cafeteria

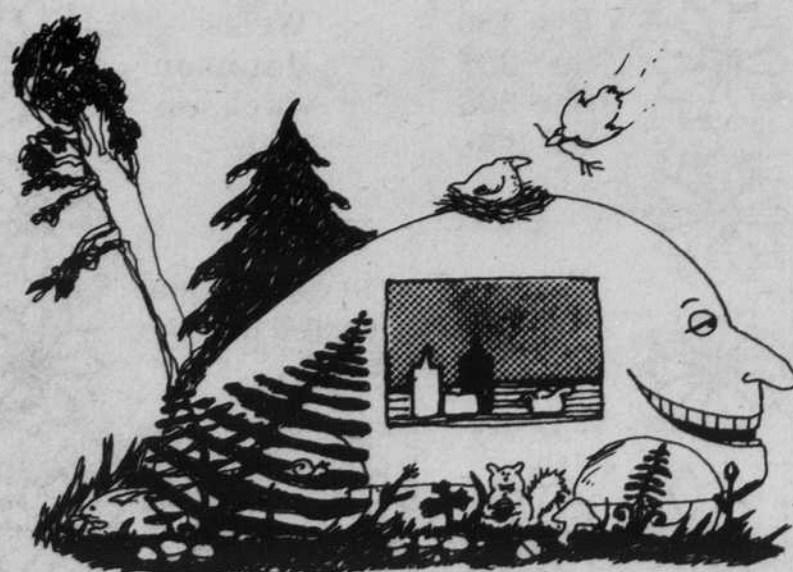
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