

The Belle of Amherst

Intimate views of a vibrant woman

Actually, *The Belle of Amherst* is not so much a play, in the classical sense, as it is an evening spent with a new friend. Although the play covers Dickinson's life from 1845 to shortly before her death in 1886, the format is that of a tea party. We, the audience,

amusing and sometimes quite deeply touching stories about her brother Austin and her beloved father. There were moments in this production of true beauty.

All of which was carried off quite well by actress Lauris and her producer/director husband

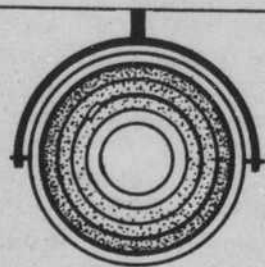
gining of the play, Dickinson says that her age is now 53, while on stage before me was a much younger looking and sounding woman.

Although I later began to believe we were actually being asked to view the spirit of the woman rather than the flesh, I am still unsure on this point. However, it only bothered me for about as long as it is taking you to read this because I was quickly swept up in Lauris' performance and the words she spoke.

The Belle of Amherst is an excellent evening of theater. See it and be moved. George and Priscilla Lauris, I raise my hat to you.

The play continues tonight through Sunday night and next Thursday through Sunday at Maude Kerns Art Center, 15th and Villard. Curtain time is 8:30 p.m. except for Sunday's at 6:30 p.m. The house and a wine and soft drink bar open 45 minutes before the curtain.

Tickets are \$4 and may be purchased at Backstage Dancewear and Theatrical Supply or at the door. A special student rush is offered today and Sunday, in which any remaining tickets will be sold for one half price at the door at 8:25 p.m. both nights only. Students must show proper I.D.



By BOB WEBB

have been invited to the Dickinson household in Amherst, Mass., for tea and cake.

Priscilla Lauris, who plays Emily Dickinson in this one-woman show, invites us into her home, rather nervously because, you understand, she has been called a rather reclusive woman and sometimes even crack-brained by the more scandal-minded folk of Amherst. She makes direct eye contact with us for most of the evening as she tells about her life in a monologue taken directly from her letters and poems.

The small stage (tastefully cluttered about with several pieces of very authentic looking furnishings) and the limited seating in the house (only around 100 seats are available) lend themselves well to the intimacy the production wants. Even the back row is not far from the stage and thus even there one feels comfortably ensconced in Dickinson's sitting room.

Emily Dickinson was a vibrant, incisive woman who made her own choices in life and was, on the whole, quite satisfied with them. Playwright William Luce has put together a production which reveals Dickinson's warmth, humanity and humor. He has included her comments on orthodox religion in nature; her moving disappointments with not having her poems published; along with some interesting poems concerning fame; her celebration of the joy of solitude ("alone, but not lonely"); and her thoughts concerning her family, especially some lovely, often

George Lauris.

Priscilla Lauris was every bit the bright, bubbling, enthusiastic and thoughtful woman she was portraying. Her performance was very precise and technically well-structured but underlined by a thorough understanding of who Emily Dickinson was.

The play calls for the actress to run quite a gamut of emotions which Lauris also managed with agility. Needless to say, I for one was very much impressed with Priscilla Lauris' creation and was completely wrapped up in Emily Dickinson's world.

George Lauris' direction was also very tight and smooth. So much so in fact that I was almost unaware of a director's hand in the performance except in retrospect. Theater is, to be sure, an actor's medium, but I have yet to see an actor alone achieve the precision which many of the moments in this production possessed.

A few elements of the production did bother me though. Chief among these was the lighting. Granted the technical facilities at the art gallery are rather limited for a theatrical production, but it seems to me that something a little more imaginative could have been done with it. I was too much aware of shadows and the colors were unnatural for the approach of the play.

Also, it took me a while to get into the production because of what I took at the time to be an inconsistency. Almost at the be-

Hear and Now is edited by Cheryl Rudert and Jerril Nilson. All contributions of any ilk are welcome. Additions to Out and About must be submitted by the Friday previous to publication.

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when the muse strikes

David Young

Of all the colors I've seen,
None reached and felt my eye
Like the soft dissonant jazz
David painted for me.
He built me a patchwork car
From scraps along the road.
I ride over and over
Each day I run alone.

The rest of us have shared words,
But not color.
Grey and green and brown
The last path in autumn
He and I ran.

Trees can't count the days.

Jeff Baird

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