

Fine performances, though slightly rushed

My first thought, as I plunked down my cushion on the backless bleacher seat and anticipated the knots that would no doubt soon form in my legs for lack of room for same, was that this had better be a good show.

Fortunately, my thoughts concerning the seating for *Candide*, playing tonight through Saturday night at the Robinson Theatre, Villard Hall, were the low point of the evening. The production was, for the most part, definitely up.

The play has been adapted from Voltaire's classic satire by Hugh Wheeler. Essentially, it's the story of a young, eternally naive orphan named Candide who is ousted from his foster family for indulging in a "physics" lesson with Cunegonde, the family's daughter and his own true love. The physics lesson was earlier given as an excuse by the family's mentor, Professor Pangloss, for certain activities he was discovered perpetrating in the bushes with the servant girl.

Pangloss believes that this is the best of all possible worlds and everything that happens is ultimately for the best. Thusly he continues to reason — even after the family is set upon by an army of cutthroats who murder, rape and pillage, sell Candide into slavery and carry Cunegonde off into the woods for obvious reasons.

The rest of the play has Candide going through various nasty

circumstances and outrageously unhealthy situations in an effort to find his lost love. He travels all over the world encountering all manner of killers, shipwrecks, earthquakes, plagues and even paradise before finding Cunegonde.

All this is set to the lovely music of Leonard Bernstein (played by an on-stage orchestra with surprisingly few misplaced notes) and the amusing and engaging lyrics of Richard Wilbur, John Latouche and Stephen Sondheim.

Director Marya Bednerik and her cast have assembled a very fine and enjoyable production, but with a rather interesting negative twist. Many University productions (and actually the same may be said for theatres almost anywhere) suffer from an insufficient rehearsal time. Often by opening night the elements haven't always jelled, rhythms aren't as well established as they need to be, sometimes lines aren't even completely down, etc. Most of the problems with this production, however, seem to stem from over-rehearsal.

Thursday's production had a great deal of pep and energy; it moved very quickly (which, considering our rather cramped quarters, was a major blessing); and the cast seemed to be having a great time. But there was something missing. I just didn't get as

excited about the show as I should have; it was too well oiled, almost mechanical.

One of the main characteristics of good theatre is the ability of the production to create the illusion of "the first time," i.e. this is the first time a character has encountered

weren't integrated through the direction or they got lost in the shuffle of doing "another musical." I had a good time watching the show, but I came away slightly dissatisfied.

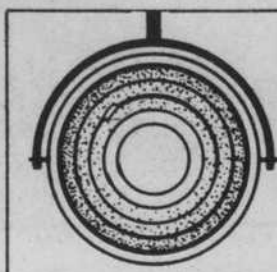
Bednerik's direction vacillated quite a bit. She was able to instill a

vocal department. Her strongly controlled soprano seemed to manage, with a good deal of ease and humor, even the more outrageous vocal gymnastics of such songs as "Glitter and Be Gay." Grant Cummings as the young naive Candide took some warming up but eventually had us going with him.

Rich Harris, as Pangloss/Voltaire, was especially good. Although not as strong a singer as the others, he was more than able to communicate his songs by "talking" through them, much as Rex Harrison did in *My Fair Lady*. Moreover, I was able to accept his characterizations; there were realities behind them. This, mixed with a good sense of timing and a great deal of energy, made for a most delightful performance.

The chorus ensemble also possessed an enormous amount of energy. At times, however, their enthusiasm got in the way of their delivery. Lyrics were often blurred and actions occasionally muddled. But when they broke up into small groups in order to provide secondary characters, they were quite good.

Candide, despite its faults, is a production well worth seeing. Even though some of the ideas don't work, the production's uniqueness and energy is refreshing and certainly worthy of our support.



By BOB WEBB

this particular situation, it is the first time he has ever said these words or made these movements in order to deal with the tasks the fates have set before him. Without this feeling of the first time, we tend to lose interest in the characters as well as our acceptance of the situations of the play and, as a result, we just don't care what happens. We aren't given anything for which to willingly suspend our disbelief. And when the illusions are gone, the mechanics are all too evident.

Granted, the plotlines of musicals often tend to be more of an excuse to bring several songs together than anything else, but that's where the real challenge of musical theatre comes in. Sure, it takes a lot of talent and training to deliver a song well and to move the body in such a way as to communicate with a dance, but we need to see a character doing these things, with something other than a pretty face and voice.

Otherwise, a good musical reduces itself to just another well-timed song and dance. Not that there's anything wrong with song and dance, but theatre has the potential of going beyond that to other levels of experience.

Bednerik's cast seemed to have the ability to reach those other levels but either those ideas

good deal of enthusiasm in her cast and she made good use of Jerry Williams' multi-leveled set, but I question some of her decisions.

Her idea of seating the audience on stage so that we could see what went on "backstage" during the performance as well as see how all the tricks worked was interesting but it often upstaged the action on stage. Although I applaud the idea of trying something different, I'm not certain if the interest was, in the long run, worth the distraction.

However, my negative thoughts notwithstanding, there is a great deal to enjoy in this production. Not the least of which are several of the performances.

Kathy Neal as Cunegonde was particularly fine, especially in the

Rock, comedy bill take The Place stage

Rocker Pat Travers and comedian Ron Douglas will be featured at The Place next week, Douglas on Sunday night and Travers on Tuesday.

Travers, touring with bassist Peter Cowling (aka "Mars") and drummer Clive Edwards, has just

released his third album *Putting It Straight* of heavy-trio rock 'n' roll. At age 23, with over a decade of playing Canadian clubs (including time with Ronnie Hawkins) and a wide assortment of recent British gigs behind him, he comes to Eugene with a power-rock format not often heard these days.

Not unlike his predecessor and inspiration Jimi Hendrix (Travers saw him at age 12 in Ottawa, got in a row over a remnant of Hendrix's demolished Stratocaster after a rendition of "Wild Thing," and soon began playing himself), Travers was to go to England in a penniless, bandless state before finally carving out a name and reputation for his music. *G/G* magazine recently voted him "Guitar Hero of '77," so there you have it.

Comic Ron Douglas has often fronted the bill for rock, pop and jazz acts over the past seven years, and arrives in Eugene a vet of the club-college tour circuit. Regarded by many as somewhere between Bill Cosby and Richard Pryor, Douglas' free-flowing style of comedy relies on experience recent and reminiscent. A native of Chicago who ended up in San Francisco, he uses both locales (and all in between) for his material. His strong point, and chief pleasure, seems to derive from the accessibility and familiarity of the situations in which he finds his humor.

"I enjoy making people laugh," he says. "I give them something positive and pleasurable and in their smiles and laughter, audiences give the same back to me. I also enjoy the way people are brought together by laughter."

Both shows start at 9:30 p.m., and cost \$1.50. Tickets may be purchased at the Sun Shop, Everybody's Records, and The Place.

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