

'Stories' worth viewing on several levels

To begin with, it's street theater. It's the sort of production that could be performed on a legit stage, the downtown mall or in your living room. It's theater designed to be mobile and versatile, the object being that it should be performed for the people, and that it should be able to go wherever the people are. It's also political and satiric. It's also funny and highly entertaining.

Stories to be Told (*Historias para ser Contadas*), playing tonight through Saturday in Villard Hall's Arena Theatre, is worth seeing on several levels, not the least of which is that it is a solid, tight-knit production.

The three stories, or playlets, were written in 1957 by Argentine playwright Osvaldo Dragun, one of Latin America's best known playwrights. According to director Lowell Fiet's notes in the program, *Stories* has become pretty much a classic of the modern Latin American theater. Fiet has taken a few liberties with the script by updating parts of it and throwing in a few North American references. Some work well and some are awkward but the pacing of the show is brisk and tight enough that even the awkward ones don't stick out too badly or for too long.

The set is bare, consisting of nothing more than an earthen brown platform, two L-shaped crate-like boxes and a mural backdrop depicting a street scene in very simple, block lines. Also used are window-shade devices on which are written the titles of the individual stories. To our left,

on stage, is a small area for two musicians.

As the audience enters, some sit in the regular seats, others sit on floor cushions or on a sort of loft area in the back. The musicians, Lee Heuermann and Randy Packer, stroll over and begin playing some soft, Latin American music. The performers, Estela Loera, Jon Irwin, Susan Mason and Darrell Grey, wander amongst us, talking with friends and welcoming strangers. The entire ambience is one of casualness and non-tradition.

The musicians end their song and the performers take their places. The performance has smoothly begun.

The titles of the playlets are rather self-explanatory as far as the plots go.

"The Story of the Abscessed Tooth" has a poor salesman, with a nagging-but-loving wife, develop an abscessed tooth. The tooth hurts so much that it pains him to talk, which is, of course, how he makes his living. He goes to a dentist to have the tooth pulled. But the dentist insists on making various tests and examinations, which although brief are expensive, only to confirm what he already knows. The poor salesman is forced to sell almost everything he owns in order to pay the dentist. The dentist is, of course, the Professional. We could easily translate his role to that of an Auto Mechanic, Physician, Plumber, TV Repairman, Electrician, etc., etc., and the story would still be the same.

The second vignette, "The Story of Our Friend Panchito Gonzales (Who Felt Responsible

for the Outbreak of Bubonic Plague in South Africa)" concerns a rising young executive who is offered a good deal of money if he can think of a cheap way for his company to win a meat supply

have it. Being a dog for most of his waking hours naturally has an effect on the man and his home life, especially as he begins to become comfortable as a dog. He develops a taste for raw meat, finds

characters throughout the performance. While some characterizations are more solid than others, the overall product is easily on the plus side. A nice, tight ensemble.

The musicians are good as well. Packer's percussive effects lend additional and occasionally slapstickish punch to the goings-on while Heuermann's Latin American ballads, interspersed throughout the performance and sung mostly in Spanish with translations provided in the program, lend an air of beauty as well as location.

Lowell Fiet is doing the community a two-fold service. One: he is presenting us with plays that no one else in town would normally do, because, although classics, they are not what would be properly considered "commercially viable" to a North American public. (The University Theatre no doubt deserves a positive stroke or two on this count as well.) And two: he has done a good job with that presentation.

The only thing I really felt lacking in the performance was length. The entire production runs just slightly over an hour. The curtain is at 8 p.m., so plan to see it and then plan to go somewhere and talk about it afterwards.



By BOB WEBB

Stories To Be Told

contract for South Africa.

After several animal substitutes are offered, each more disgusting than the one before, and rejected because they would cost too much, our hero finally comes up with the idea of selling rat meat. It would be cheap, he could get a medal for cleaning out the rat population in town and, after all, the people of South Africa "are different from us." The meat begins to smell funny on its voyage to South Africa and shortly after it arrives, the Plague breaks out. Poor Panchito, whose wife says he's changed after being offered the contract, certainly feels guilty about what's happened. But, were he able to do it over, he's not sure he wouldn't do the same thing. He has a family to feed and, after all, "5,000 pesos is 5,000 pesos."

"The Story of the Man Who Turned Into a Dog" is about a young man with a family to support looking for a job. Naturally the Big Factory he applies at has nothing. Except, oh yes, the night watchdog died recently. The young man is asked about his barking abilities. He accepts the job with the promise that "as soon as something opens up" he can

the on-hands-and-knees position more comfortable than standing erect, etc. Of course, another job never seems to open up.

If the plot outlines sound bleak and depressing, it's only because they are. But that's something that doesn't hit until later. The talent of Dragun's plays and Fiet's staging is that the way in which they are told is very funny indeed, in a dark sort of way. Good satire is marked by its ability to entertain while being observed; and thought about while going about one's business the next day. *Stories to Be Told* qualifies as good satire.

The performers are more than up to the task. Each is called upon to become several different

Dylan

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tinues to nurture a screen persona that has the potential of being as strikingly individual as, and even in the same league as, Buster Keaton's. As Renaldo he extends — or brings up to date — the quirky bystander of Peckinpah's *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid*, intimately uninvolved in the world about him, whose few uttered words audaciously risk the ridiculous but occasionally manage to break through to become compelling if evanescent insights. (I even found myself wishing that he had played Arlo Guthrie in Penn's *Alice's Restaurant*.) "Evasiveness is only in the mind," he evasively utters in *Renaldo and Clara*, and for one wacky moment it sounds like Perfect Truth. No doubt about it; if he chooses the right vehicles, Bob Dylan has a future as a film actor.

Whether he can turn the hat trick and become a film director is a question that cannot be answered on the evidence this muddled, ultimately disappointing film offers. The good news is that the major critics were wrong in writing off *Renaldo and Clara* as totally without merit. The bad news is that, however fascinating it is, it is a failure as a film.

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