

Theater



Mrs. Candour (Susan Mason) makes a point to Benjamin Backbite (Greg Spencer) in "The School for Scandal," playing tonight through Saturday.

Photo by Bob Baker

The School for Scandal
Written by Richard Brinsley Sheridan
Directed by Grant McKernie
University Theatre
Tonight through Saturday

Allow me to introduce Lady Sneerwell, head mistress of this scandalous school. She, Mrs. Candour, Benjamin Backbite and many other venom-tongued members of fashionable society

may be found killing characters and ruining reputations in the Robinson Theatre this weekend.

The occasion for all the gossip-mongering is the University Theatre's brilliant production of Sheridan's *The School for Scandal*. Director Grant McKernie and company must have worked long and hard to achieve the delicate balance between satire and

sentiment required by this delightful comedy of manners.

Sheridan's ironic awareness of humanity's pretensions and duplicities rings as true as it surely did when it opened at the Drury Lane Theatre in London over 200 years ago.

The story concerns two brothers who wear contrasting reputations. Joseph Surface (Rod C. Septka) is admired by nearly all as a man of style and sentiment. His brother Charles (David C. Johnston) in known to be extravagant, even dissipated. But their long-absent and unrecognized uncle Oliver (Jim Lundstrom) hatches a plan to expose Joseph's hypocritical core and Charles' heart of gold.

Meanwhile, the elder Sir Peter Teazle (Jerry Walker), a pathetic and comic figure, is cuckolded by his much younger wife, the mischievously charming Lady Teazle (Elise Jordan).

All the cast members inhabit their flowing gowns, knee breeches and powdered wigs, the delightful products of Alex-

andra Bonds and an enormous costume crew, as though they've worn them all their lives. The equally beautiful backdrops, designed by Jerry Williams, smoothly transform the set through several scene changes.

But neither the costumes nor the set for a moment overpower the lightness and accuracy with which everyone delivers Sheridan's barbed lines. The perfect diction and timing becomes a seemingly effortless part of the minuet of action, carried out in all the elegance of fashionable society at an 18th century festivity.

The "screen scene," one of the most famous scenes in all comedy theater, provides an appropriately hilarious climax to the most entertaining evening of theater in Eugene this season.

I neither desire nor am able to single out anyone from the uniformly excellent cast. The characters' frequent "asides" to the audience, coupled with their enthusiasm, make this a play that kept me smiling in between bouts of laughter.

If there's anyone out there who reads play reviews but rarely attends a play, *The School for Scandal* is the one to see.

By David Grober.

Film

The Last Supper
Directed by Tomas Gutierrez Alea
Screenplay by Tomas Gonzalez, Maria Eugenia Haya, and Tomas Gutierrez Alea

As Cubans flee by the thousands to this country, ostensibly escaping Communist repression, a Cuban film dealing with repression in a much earlier era is being screened in Eugene. *The Last Supper*, a fairly recent offering by noted Cuban director Tomas Gutierrez Alea, is about slaves and masters and the tortured relationship that existed between them.

The owner of a sugar cane plantation in 18th century Cuba, known simply as "the Count," becomes overwhelmed by what would now be called white guilt. Feeling twinges of responsibility toward the slaves who cut the sugar cane that sweetens his life, he attempts to expiate his guilt and humble himself by serving a recreated New Testament last supper to 12 randomly selected slaves.

During the lavish dinner the Count consciously likens himself to Christ, casting the slaves in the roles of Christ's disciples.

The Count imitates Christ's personal humility toward His disciples by washing the slaves' feet. But the truth is the Count is still a slave owner expecting his slaves to be meek and hard-working. As the "enlightened" French engineer modernizing the plantation's sugar mills says at one point, the Count's position allows him the luxury of cleansing his sins.

The almost arrogant show of humility to the slaves is to be taken by them as an example of how they should act toward their master.

The slaves, a bit puzzled at being hauled off to eat with the master at his own table, aren't at all eager to reciprocate the master's proffered humility, especially when it is expected of them 364 days a year.

Not troubled by white guilt, they mistakenly assume their master has undergone a genuine Christian transformation and will take the slaves' side against the high-handed mulatto overseer. The very next day, with the Count back in his Havana villa, the slaves revolt against the overseer when he attempts to make them work on

the traditional holiday of Good Friday.

Predictably, a vengeful Count returns to the burned-out plantation and in a fine sequence of scenes lets fall his mask of Christian gentility. The Count has the 12 slaves who shared his table hunted down, revealing himself as a reactionary, motivated, perhaps, by the fear of being murdered in a Haitian-style slave uprising.

The Last Supper is a beautifully photographed film. The supper scene is reminiscent of a rich still-life, contrasting intensely with the thin colors of the outside plantation scenes.

Followers of the Latin American Film Series may recall seeing one of Gutierrez Alea's earlier films, *Memories of Underdevelopment*, shown a couple of months ago. *The Last Supper* is the final offering in the series, sponsored by the University Romance Language Department, the Eugene Committee for a Free Chile and MEChA.

The film plays Saturday at 2 p.m. at Cinema 7 and on campus in 177 Lawrence Wednesday at 7:30 p.m.

By Jim Gersbach

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