

# Theater

**Much Ado About Nothing**  
Written by William Shakespeare  
Performed by the University Theatre  
Directed by Robert Barton

The University Theatre's current production of *Much Ado About Nothing* is one extravagance after another.

The set's tiered balconies, the lavish costumes, and the gay and glamorous atmosphere of the town of Messina all lend to an overall extravagant production.

And this is just as it should be.

The heart of this successful comedy is the acting. Director Robert Barton gets some very strong performances from his cast. Especially good are Michael Nering and Elise Fulsang as Benedick and Beatrice.

Benedick, Claudio, Don Pedro and Don John, comrades in arms, visit the court of Leonato, governor of Messina. Benedick and Claudio proceed to court Leonato's daughter Hero and his niece, Beatrice. But these are no ordinary courtships.

For Claudio (Todd Hermanson) and Hero (Theresa Albright), courtship is a very formal, social affair. For Benedick and Beatrice, courtship is the result of their being tricked into admitting their true feelings for each other.

One affair is nearly ruined by deception, the other is initiated by it.

The production, as a whole, is a perfect introduction to Shakespeare. The cast seems comfortable with even the most difficult passages — their enunciation is clear, their timing perfect. Benedick and Beatrice, in particular, turn their constant bickering and verbal game-playing into a sportive celebration of rich language. Benedick complains to Beatrice, after she betters him in one linguistic skirmish: "Thou has frightened the word of his right sense, so forcible is they wit."

Barton lets the players take their time, providing plenty of generous pauses to absorb the houseful of laughter. Even novices to Shakespeare will have no trouble finding fun in all this.

M.W. Mitchell, as Don John, plays a convincing bastard as brother to Don Pedro. D. Patrick Lawler, as the constable Dogberry, is a delightful Shakespearean clown with a grandiose vision of himself, and a talent for abusing the language that rivals Archie Bunker's.

Minor faults can be found. Barton and choreographer Susan Zadoff have trouble keeping the action focused in the full-cast scenes. Some of the minor roles are lacking in the overall exuberance and attentiveness to the language. But these are easily overlooked.

But such an accessible, entertaining work of Shakespeare's should not be missed.

Reserved tickets are \$4.50 for the general public, \$2.75 for university students and senior citizens and \$3.50 for other students. Call the box office at 686-4191 from noon to 4 p.m. Monday through Saturday for ticket information.

David Grober



Theresa Albright stars as Hero in the University Theatre's production of *Much Ado About Nothing*.

Photo provided by University Theatre

**U.S.A.**  
Written by Paul Shyre and John Dos Passos  
Performed by the Oregon Repertory Theatre  
Directed by David Lunney

To the extent that a work of art's success depends upon what is left out of it, the distillation for the stage of John Dos Passos' three-volume historical fiction, *U.S.A.*, is a remarkable achievement.

But to the extent that the theater can bring history to life by exploring the characters of the persons that helped make it, *U.S.A.* is a failure.

This musical-dramatic revue is consistently entertaining,

thanks mainly to a six-member cast that works expertly and enthusiastically from start to finish.

The play's diluted impact must be blamed on the overly ambitious nature of this adaptation. Cramming together a whirlwind of headlines, skits about several colorful figures of the early 20th century, and a variety of old popular songs — while still trying to make sense of a public relation man's rise to power — just proves to be too much or an evening of theater.

Still, it's delightful to sit back and witness highlights of the American Experience fly by, from its emerging global power status at the turn of the century

to the brink of depression at the close of the Roaring Twenties.

The show is strongest during the cast's renditions of such songs as "Give My Regards to Broadway" and "Happy Days are Here Again." They are accompanied by pianist John Maddy.

Also good are the brief, often unexpected anecdotal interludes about some of the more colorful and influential personalities that inhabited this era: the Wright brothers, Henry Ford, Rudolph Valentino, Isadora Duncan, union organizer Eugene Debs — we get interesting and sometimes quite moving glimpses of them all.

The show is weakest in find-

ing sufficient resources to create any real drama out of the story of J. Ward Moorehouse, who rises to the top of the public relations business. What little interest his story does generate is the result of a superb performance by Kelly J. Ray, a compact dynamo of an actor who handles the younger Moorehouse's cherubic and optimistic air and the older man's palatial loneliness with convincing ease.

"Do people ever wonder," Moorehouse's wife asks of him, "how a big, important man like you can be so empty?"

Substitute "nation" for "man" and ask that question again. The prominence Moore-

house's life story receives in this dramatic collage of American history is significant, and it gives a hollow ring to the chorus of affirmations that end the play: "America is the lives of its people." People like Moorehouse?

For all its weaknesses, the play is a strong production through the work of Director David Lunney and his cast. Entertainment value aside, *U.S.A.* is also interesting for suggesting the potential theater has to illuminate other times in our nation's history.

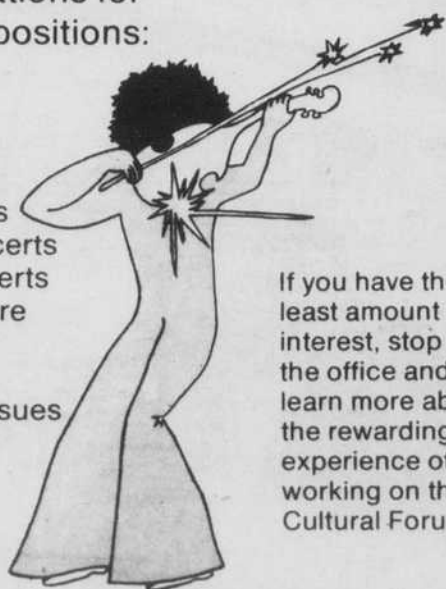
*U.S.A.* continues at the Oregon Repertory Theater tonight through March 9th.

David Grober

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