

Reviewers Attempt Assessment of 1955 Shakespearean Festival Seen as Whole

Generally Favorable Verdict Pronounced By Tribune Writers

(Editor's note: The Mail Tribune this year revives a custom it has followed at the end of previous Shakespearean Festivals, and publishes a "year-end" review of the festival as a whole. Contributing to these reviews, which attempt to assess various phases of the event in retrospect, are two staff members and one contributor, each of whom has seen all five plays offered this season.)

Prediction Impossible For Successful Plays

Recent festival seasons have proven one fact—it is useless to predict which plays will be successful and which won't. Productions of "The Winter's Tale" in 1952 and "All's Well That Ends Well" this season, about which the directors were most dubious, turned out to be two of the most popular. Perhaps this is partly due to the fact that directors and cast rise to the challenge, put forth extra effort and overcome the handicaps of weak plots and inviolated play structures.

The best acting of the year sometimes turns up in a weak play, too. "Henry VI—Part Three" is a disorganized dramatic work with unrelieved brutal action, tending to make it tiresome on the one hand and revolting to some playgoers on the other. But this year it proved the vehicle for some of the season's best acting.

Picks Best Scene
This reviewer selects the Tower death scene where William Oyler, playing Richard of Gloucester, stabs to death King Henry (Paul Kliss) as the most effective scene of the year, and Oyler's playing of Richard as the most outstanding work among the men actors.

Oyler's violent Richard, opposed to the restrained, almost sad, portrayal of the king by Kliss, heightened the dramatic intensity of the action, and the plot comes to a climax with Henry's death. Previous death scenes in the play are bloody, violent and played center stage with all stops out. In contrast, Kliss, as King Henry, merely curls up against the wall and dies quietly, as he had lived.

The combination of these two fine actors plus the inspiration of Director James Sandoe made this an outstanding scene. Kliss directed Macbeth this year, as well as playing two leading roles, proving as he did last year that his theatrical "know how" is not confined to acting. **Company Praised**
The company this year as a

whole was good. Not only was there excellent new talent among both the men and women, but there was no one who turned out to be so bad that his acting was conspicuous, as has been the case in some past years.

On the other hand, the company was smaller than it should be. Festival fans who had complaints this year about the casting probably do not realize that no one director is able to cast a play exactly as he would like to, due to the demands of other directors and other plays. Joan Kugell would have made a fine Puck, but she was needed more in other roles and there is a limit to what one player can do during a season.

The new talent this year included such excellent players as Robert Stattel from Floral Park, New York; Donald Soule, Newark, Conn.; Tom Luce, Palo Alto, Calif.; Michael Kasdan, New York City; Joan Kugell, Natick, Mass.; and Marjorie Schaffer of Milwaukee, Wis.

Robert Loper of Stanford university, was another outstanding first-timer. Loper not only directed "Timon" and "All's Well" (the latter broke box office records) in a creditable fashion, but played the coveted title role in Macbeth. We hope Loper returns another year to prove our belief that he is capable of better acting than we saw in Macbeth this season.

Women Players
Marjorie Schaffer and Joan Kugell were outstanding among the women players. Both carried heavy acting loads and came up with excellent performances in every role. Miss Schaffer has a pleasing stage personality and appearance, and her roles showed the smoothness which experience, talent and intelligence produce. Miss Kugell brings an eagerness and vitality to the stage which is extremely appealing.

Agnes David surprised many with her engaging portrayal of Helena in "A Midsummer Night's Dream." Miss David had been in the festival company for two years past but only in the costuming department, and some have been wondering why her

ability as an actress had not been brought to light before.

Erad Curtis deserves special mention, too. Curtis, a sort of jack-of-all-trades, is improving as an actor and his light-hearted singing of old English songs is one of the bright spots of the festival entertainment features.

Music Improving

Most festival fans believe that the music is slowly improving, although perhaps it is not exactly what Tom B. Cooke expected when he offered to underwrite this part of the festival program. This year Bernard Windt, music director, is especially pleased with success of the Sunday afternoon concerts. Director Windt thought they might draw two or three dozen music lovers—instead 200 to 300 or more persons turned out each Sunday.

An innovation was recording of all incidental music and sound effects for the plays with the exception of some of the drum work. Use of the tympani in "Macbeth," suggested by Director Kliss and worked out by Windt, who did the actual playing, was one of the most dramatic bits of atmosphere produced this year.

Two Questions

Looking back over the season two big questions come to mind. One—should the festival continue to produce five plays, with the fifth as a two-night attempt? There is no doubt that "Timon" would have been a better production this year if it had not been rehearsed in the middle of the night after actors, directors and technicians were already exhausted from their efforts for the major plays.

The other big question is this—are the festival plays coming up to the standards which they themselves are setting? Year by year the festival is creating an audience which is growing more and more familiar with Shakespeare, more and more appreciative, and by the same token, more and more demanding. Can the festival directors and actors live up to this?—O.S.

Costuming Department Cited for Development

Costuming for the festival has developed a great deal since the revival in 1947. The department has been expanded to include two full-time assistants, where only volunteer help from local people was available. Although most of the materials used are bought outside the valley, local donations are still appreciated. Costuming techniques have improved greatly as a result of the costumer's several trips abroad to study in Europe and England.

One minor element of the

costumes which were new this summer were rather distracting. The peaked hats worn by Richard and several minor characters in "Henry" give a dashing appearance which we feel is not completely harmonious with the rest of the costumes and the characters themselves. For the most part the costuming was excellent.

Appearance Altered

With the expansion of the festival the appearance of the stage itself and the scenery used have been altered.

The brown trim on the gray walls of the stage has been made more ornate, and the use of scenery in the "inner below" has been increased. The assortment of stage furniture has been added to very little, but one addition which we feel is not in keeping with the Elizabethan atmosphere is the use of camp stools, such as are sold by Army surplus stores, in "Henry" and "All's Well." Any improvement in curtains has been made with the use of a different set for each play, but with the removal of main stage curtains in all plays but "All's Well," we feel that the smooth flow of the shows has been somewhat retarded.

Likes Queen's Touch

One practice which has been discontinued by the festival, and which we would like to see restored, is that of choosing a Queen Elizabeth for opening night ceremonies, either from the cast or from the people of Ashland. The presence of the queen lends a touch to opening night which makes it seem a little less like a Chamber of Commerce meeting.

In our opinion Joan Kugell is the best of the actresses this season. With only two years of training at Carnegie Tech, she has done an excellent job of each of the varied roles assigned to her. Many actresses who could perform Hermitia with no trouble would be lacking in the ability to interpret the Prince of Wales in "Henry" or an old man in "Timon" without provoking laughter in the audience. In addition to these parts she has also been seen as a witch in Macbeth and Helena in "All's Well," two diametrically opposed parts which would tax any performer asked to do them at the same time. Her diction is clear and her stage presence makes the audience forget her small stature.

Welcome Addition

Popular with both cast and audience, Richard T. Jones is a welcome addition to the festival. His stage presence is good, and his diction clear enough to overcome the partial loss of voice which aroused the sympathy of the audience the opening night of Timon. We do not know how much experience with Shake-

speare this actor has had; it is possible that this is his first. There is something almost modern in his reading of lines which prompts us to suggest that he would be excellent in a performance of Christopher Fry's "The Lady's Not For Burning." This play is written in the Elizabethan style and yet has a distinctly modern flavor.

One thing which has become apparent to many members of the festival audience is that some actors can double, that is, perform two different roles in one play, and some can't. Jack Swanson and Jack Colvin are two who can. Both have improved greatly since last season, and both are able to disguise their voices and appearance so that the audience isn't disturbed when an actor who died on stage five minutes ago comes in as a messenger bringing tidings of his own death. Such an actor must indeed be welcome to a director who finds that he has more parts to assign than actors.

Newcomer Praised

Among the newcomers this season is Jack MacPhee, who has a voice which will, with training, produce the type of deep velvety tones which make John Hume stand out in the memories of festival audiences who saw his performance of Othello in 1948. We feel that young MacPhee will improve with further training and if he returns, will be an asset to the festival.

Best Performance

For best performance of the season we nominate that of William Oyler as Richard in "Henry." This actor, so mild and retiring off stage, has come into his own as the deformed, vicious Richard. We therefore name the scene which ends Act III, scene 2, of Henry, in which Richard declares his intention of getting the English crown, as the most exciting of the season. It is our sincere hope that he be asked to continue the part as Richard III in 1956.—R.S.

Company's Efforts Not Soon To Be Forgotten

Oregon Shakespearean Festival's 1955 season will close tonight with the production of "A Midsummer Night's Dream" under an almost full moon.

Players soon will return to some 15 states from which they came and resume educations, teachings, directing and other positions. We are looking forward to seeing some of them back another year. But their determined effort to make the Ashland productions a success will not be forgotten, and this reviewer will anxiously wait

cause otherwise he is a capable actor.

Festival Veteran

We would like to commend Richard Graham for his excellent interpretation of the drunken porter in Macbeth. This actor has been in the company since 1948, and has performed many parts in that time. Not many actors, who could portray the part of King Lear as well as Richard Graham, would be able to perform a small comedy role and make it stick in the minds of the audience. Richard Graham is one of the "backbones" of the festival, and we feel that his loyalty to the Ashland enterprise is as commendable as his versatile, high-quality acting.

Frank Pinnock, although his experience with the festival has been only three seasons, is another "backbone." His acting is consistently good, if not brilliant, and he has also contributed greatly to the festival through his fencing ability.

Oyler Versatile

William Oyler provided diversified entertainment in the characters of Banquo, Richard, and Parolles, all with personalities

next year's productions of William Shakespeare's plays.

Excitingly Entertaining

Looking back over this year's five productions, each has been excitingly entertaining. It was this reviewer's first festival season, which perhaps has resulted in favorable bias caused, probably, by attending productions which fail to maintain audience attention, staged by other organizations.

Among items which has made this year's plays successful are versatility of players, directorship, lighting, costuming and the Elizabethan playhouse atmosphere.

Player versatility was witnessed in Richard T. Jones, who aptly played Bottom in "A Midsummer Night's Dream," and played Timon as well. Jones' somewhat hoarse voice added to Timon's plight after he lost his wealth.

Oyler Versatile

William Oyler provided diversified entertainment in the characters of Banquo, Richard, and Parolles, all with personalities

ranging from coward to premeditated murderer. With the possible exception of The Painter

in Timon, Oyler seemed to fit characters which he portrayed. Versatility of playing also was dominant in characters played by Donald E. Soule. Among the better ones were the doctor in Macbeth, the Philosopher in Timon, Theseus and King Edward IV, but he also played well the part of Donalbain in Macbeth and Bertram in "All's Well That Ends Well."

Joan Kugell effectively portrayed both male and female parts, and Marjorie Schaffer acted with dignity the parts of Lady Macbeth, Countess Roussillon and Lady Gray. Irene G. Baird as Hippolyta and Queen Margaret characterized the parts aptly.

Not All Acting

But producing successful plays whether Shakespeare's or another playwright's, is not all in acting. Credit should be extended to Directors James Sandoe for "A Midsummer Night's

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