

# End of Season Reviews of Festival Plays

## Excellent Production Of 'Merchant' Noted

It was an excellent production of "The Merchant of Venice" last Thursday night in the Oregon Shakespearean Festival theater in Ashland, but it was a sad event.

When the players took their final bows, when Richard Graham had spoken the traditional closing night verse from "Tempest," when the last notes of "Greensleeves" died away, many in the audience felt more than usual regret that another season had ended. For soon the old theater will be torn down, and although those of us who have made the Festival an important part of our lives know that a fine, new theater will rise in its place, we cannot see the old one go without a twinge of sadness.

The old building and the old stage were part of the Festival's growing pains. At times the pains were rather grim, but these were always forgotten in the excitement and glow of a good opening night, or of a scene which captured and held the audience; they faded away in the color and drama, were of no consequence when a vibrant voice could be heard speaking the singing poetry.

The new theater will be the fulfillment of the dreams of Angus Bowmer and all the many others who have worked hard to build the Festival. But while the work goes on for the new and growing Festival, the scenes of the past will still be a part of the picture.

This writer, for one, will never forget Paul Kliss and William Ball in their roles in the Second Part, King Henry IV; Philip Hanson as Hotspur, Clara Daniels as Regan, William Oyster as Pistol or Brutus, Joyce Womak for her Ophelia, Joan Kugell for her Margaret in Richard the Third, or any of her other roles, Don Gunderson as Richard or Antony—the list could grow longer and longer.

**Still Doing So**

Some of these we believe, with regret, will never be seen on the Ashland festival stage again. We hope we are wrong. Others who have made acting history for the Festival are still doing so, and each year the Oregon play series continues to attract intelligent and talented players from all parts of the nation.

For the season just closed, this reporter's personal Oscar goes to Angus Bowmer for his unforgettable Shylock, and to Richard Graham for a moving performance as King Lear.

We've seen both in the same roles before but these were richer, better rooted and more rewarding.

Not being an authority on the Elizabethan period, we know not whether Bowmer's costume and wig were truly authentic but if not, who cares? They subtly accented the interpretation which he

chose to give Shylock this year, and we approve.

**Praises Actors**

Praise also goes to Nagle Jackson and Michael O'Sullivan for their skillful playing of Launcelot Gobbo, the clown, and Old Gobbo, his father. William Nye gave a satisfying performance as Bassanio, and the quartet of friends, Rudolf E. Vest Jr., Charles A. Cook, George Riddle and Keith Fowler, gave the proper color and substance to their scenes.

We find Margaret Vafiadis a fine and intelligent actress, and enjoy her playing, particularly when she speaks of love. However, in the courtroom scene of "The Merchant of Venice" Mrs. Vafiadis, and for that matter, other actresses we've seen in the same role on the Ashland stage, fail to hold our interest. Somehow, our imagination balks.

This year, Shirley Douglas and Ellen Kay added feminine charm as Nerissa and Jessica.

George Vafiadis' presence in the Festival company this year and last has been as welcome as that of his wife. His playing of the Duke of Albany in "King Lear" added authority to that cast. For that matter, the entire cast of "Lear" turned in good, solid performances to back up Richard Graham's lead.

Claude Jenkins has fine stature and bearing, and he uses his rich voice to good advantage.

One must not forget Edward Grover's playing of the Duke of Kent. Grover's acting has weight and character and his lines were delivered to good effect. Although not a large man, Grover is impressive on stage—especially when he stooped down, picked up a man larger than himself—Graham, and carried him off stage.

**Three Daughters**

The three daughters of "King Lear" are characters in which an actress has ample opportunity to show her talents, and this season Director Don Loper had three able young women in his cast. Rosalyn Newport's gentle Cordelia was well contrasted to the scheming and unlovable Goneril and Regan, played by Elizabeth Hiller and Rachel Weller.

As for "Much About Nothing," this reviewer found Harold V. Gould an utterly delightful Benedick, and Patricia Moran a charming Beatrice. Gould's playing of the cynical bachelor was keyed just right and his timing on the comedy lines faultless. His doleful attempt to sing a song was one of the most hilarious scenes of the season.

We liked George Vafiadis as Claudio, and the comedy scenes of Hugh Evans and Robert Towers, playing Dogberry and Verges, were well done.

**Dissatisfaction**

Perhaps it was the fault of our lack of background, but "Troilus and Cressida" left us with a feeling of dissatisfaction, as of something started

but unfinished. We have no quarrel with the playing or direction, and cannot actually explain our dissatisfaction. George and Margaret Vafiadis achieved both sweetness and ardour in their love scenes, and Vafiadis has a true feeling for the poetry, as well as drama.

We hope that the Festival attempts this play again before too long.

At the beginning of the season Producing Director Bowmer was heard to say "this is a good company—this should be a good season." And it was.

The Oregon Shakespearean Festival in Ashland has immeasurably enriched the life of this reviewer and her family in recent years, and as it has done for us, so it must do for others. Shakespeare brings us laughter and wisdom, poetry and drama, speeches that are earthy or lyrical; Shakespeare brings to the valley people from all over the nation, people with stimulating personalities and ideas who stir us up. And if you must be practical, it brings in money—cold hard cash which tinkles in the cash registers all over southern Oregon.

Long live Shakespeare and the festival! —O.S.

## Dissagreement Voiced To Critic's Verdict

This reviewer has expressed elsewhere his disagreement with a verdict of Henry Hewes, drama critic for The Saturday Review, that the bareness of the Elizabethan stage, and the rather strict adherence to the Tudor example, leaves something to be desired in the Oregon "Shakespearean Festival in Ashland."

In his Review article, cleverly entitled "Will o' the West," Hewes pursues this, saying: "One wonders if the positive values that have been achieved here would be lost if the Ashland Festival would occasionally invite a guest director to produce a show and allow him to introduce some modern innovations that would make the plays less remote to contemporary audiences."

**Asks What Is Remote**

What, one inquires, is remote about these plays? Are they remote when they make teenagers roar with laughter, or shed a surreptitious tear?

Are they remote when the SRO sign is out night after night, with discriminating patrons from every state of the union?

Are they remote when patrons who "discover" Shakespeare in Ashland return (despite the wooden seats) again and again, in preference to the best (or worst) that Hollywood or TV can offer?

These plays are about as remote as a sock on the jaw. We do not, of course, know to what "modern innovations" Hewes refers.

But it cannot be costuming; we would say this has been getting better and better each year, achieving a sort of colorful mood music all its own, as it helps delineate character, theme and action.

**Little More Asked**

It cannot, assuredly, be lighting. For with handicaps imposed by a difficult technical situation, the lighting has reached a point of virtuosity where little more could reasonably be asked.

Surely he doesn't want a proscenium, nor a draw-curtain, nor a mechanically revolving stage.

What, then, does he want? Something, perhaps, that is just a little more familiar to him? And if so, what?

We admit to prejudice when it comes to the lovely little bowl in Lithia park. This is the tenth season for this festival viewer, and some seasons have been better than others.

But we have seen here

drama which was to us surely as evocative as Oliver's "Henry V" or "Hamlet," or Roberson's Othello, or Evans' "Hamlet" in modern dress, or Lunt and Fontaine's "Shrew."

Differently of course. But if Old Will himself is hovering somewhere around, we suspect he's on our side.

**Approve Final Lines**

And before we leave Friend Hewes, let us recall with approval his final line: "The best performers... could be intermingled with those of our most professional Eastern festivals to our advantage."

Harold V. Gould, Michael O'Sullivan, Hugh Evans, Robert Towers and Nagle Jackson tickled our funny bone as it is seldom tickled. Edward Grover is a stalwart and capable man who gave his "straight" roles credence and likeability, and Richard Graham's professional poise, and occasional moments of real feeling always are an asset to the festival.

Patricia Moran, among the women, was superb as Beatrice—rather better on opening night than in mid-season, although this was probably the result of an "off-night" rather than a decline in the quality of her acting. Margaret Vafiadis' Portia grew in stature and believability as the season advanced.

## Standouts of Season

These, for our money, were the standouts of a generally exceptional acting season, except for the one real dramatic triumph of the festival, that of mild, innocuous little Angus Bowmer, who by some theatrical legerdemain transformed himself into a crafty, self-centered and evil Shylock, played for laughs.

And why not? Old Will never turned up his nose at a belly-laugh, any more than he tempered the prejudices of his age with a blurring of character, or any more than he sugar-coated the animal instincts of mankind.

No, Bowmer's Shylock is greasy, but funny; self-centered, and funny; avaricious, and funny; revengeful, and funny. Even the lines, which under other auspices and other interpretations can be so poignant ("I am a Jew. Hath not a Jew eyes? Hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions...") were here, somehow, ludicrous. Here was not a Jew crying sympathy for his tragic race, but a small boy crying to another "I'm just as good as you are!" before spitting in his fellow's face—or, in this case, insisting on his pound of flesh.

There is something else about the festival which makes it something apart—something beyond the lights and costumes and acting and direction and color.

It has an aura.

**Difficult to Pin Down**

The source of this light is difficult to pin down, but from the "feeling" of the participants toward the entire endeavor. And in "participants," we include the audience, for they, indeed, partake of the festival, and are a part of it.

This participation breeds a special kind of loyalty and a special kind of affection.

And maybe that is why the festival is such an overwhelming success, and remains so, good season or poor, year in and year out.

After all, isn't that what the stage is for—to make the audience feel a part of what goes on?—E.A.

## Festival Goes Modern With View of Rocket

One claim that may be added to the Oregon Shakespearean Festival association this year would be that it is "modern" as well as being the first Shakespearean Festival in the United States. Not every outdoor theatre, Shakespearean or other, could boast that the rocket of Sputnik may

be viewed during a performance!

Regardless how much this writer reads the plays in advance, character identification is always hard, especially when names are not used until well into the play.

Too bad the Bard didn't use the scene in more of his plays that was used in "Troilus and Cressida" when Cressida and Pandarus were on the balcony. Pandarus quitted nicely for the audience identified the majority of the Trojans as they entered the stage.

**Particularly Good**

The costumes were particularly good in Troilus and Cressida, especially the men's uniforms. They did not have the clean polished look about them as many of the costumes did, but looked as though they had been worn (as if in battle) and looked natural for the setting.

This writer's vote for favorite this year goes to King Lear, possibly because it is so well known, but then Merchant of Venice is, too, widely read. The costumes in King Lear seemed well suited to the play especially the order and belt worn by the king and other royalty.

The brightest costumes were found in Merchant of Venice and particularly liked by the undersigned was the clothing worn by Shylock.

**Note Lesser Roles**

Also worthy of note are several of the lesser roles. For example Hugh C. Evans as Dogberry in "Much Ado About Nothing," Robert Towers as the Fool in "King Lear" and Nagle Jackson as Launcelot Gobbo in "Merchant of Venice."

This writer repeats what was said in 1956 that copies of the words of the songs sung prior to the performances by the minstrel singers would make a clever souvenir book. This reviewer was also pleased to note that the singers were offering advice to smokers again this year.

## Actors Are Gone, But Not at All Forgotten

"Our revels now are ended. These our actors, As I foretold you, Are melted into air, into thin air."

Thusly did Richard Graham, quoting William Shakespeare's Prospero in "The Tempest," close the 18th season of the Oregon Shakespearean Festival in Ashland Thursday night.

The actors now are gone, but not at all forgotten. Nor are their interpretations and presentations of Shakespeare's colorful characters forgotten.

For who is it can forget George Ridde's Gratiano, Angus Bowmer's Shylock, Nagle Jackson's Launcelot Gobbo, Harold V. Gould's Benedick, Hugh C. Evans' Dogberry, Richard Graham's King Lear, Jerry Turner's Earl of Gloucester and George and Margaret Vafiadis' Troilus and Cressida, to name but a few from a company of about 90 who made the Festival productions a success.

**Not Melted Into Air**

They have not "melted into air, into thin air." Nor have the costumes, the lighting, and the very staging of the plays themselves. The Festival's policy to stage Shakespeare's plays as they were staged in the late 1590's and early 1600's will bring Festival patrons back season after season. And as the Ashland performances become more well-known inevitably will increase.

It is not one segment of the production which is remembered. It is the over-all presentation from actors through the technical aspects, and the Elizabethan setting, including singers and dancers on the green.

Individual acting parts, such as Bowmer's Shylock, Gra-

ham's King Lear and Turner's Gloucester, will be remembered as outstanding, but generally speaking, the high-caliber, versatility of the company is what made the productions attract Shakespeare enthusiasts from all sections of the country.

**Company a Good One**

This year's company seemed an especially good one, endowed with the versatility necessary to play a leading role one night and a messenger or a man in armour the next night.

Not one play can be singled out as being better produced or directed than another. Shakespeare was seen in all his diversified genius in the four plays; he portrayed tragic men, egotists, comers, lovers, and fools with human qualities which perhaps today a psychologist could use to categorize such persons.

Actors selected for the parts rewarded audiences with top quality characterizations; they lived and died the parts they played; they injected into Shakespeare's verse and prose animation which brought the audience into the play; they presented the plays to carry themselves, and the undersigned believes they would have carried themselves even without elaborate costumes or modern lighting.

**Problems To Present**

If there was a play which could not carry itself, it was "Troilus and Cressida." But it would not have been because of acting. Rather it was because of Shakespeare himself. The long, uninterrupted passages in "Troilus" are problems to present and maintain audience interest.

"Troilus" is probably one of Shakespeare's least produced plays, and it is understandable. It has an enormous cast of characters, who traverse back and forth between the Trojan and Greek camps creating confusion.

The acting itself in "Troilus" was on a par with that of other plays. Mr. and Mrs. Vafiadis portrayed Troilus and Cressida admirably, and Claude Jenkins and Robert Loper fit the parts of Achilles and Hector.

**Better Entertainment**

Shakespeare's construction in the other three plays, "King Lear," "Much Ado About Nothing," and "The Merchant of Venice," is more adaptable to better entertainment. And entertaining they were, not because they were written by the great playwright alone, but because excellent actors and actresses were cast in parts they lived. They brought into that life

the audience.

Although the actors now are gone, the plays remain vividly in our memory, and in another year, we shall look forward to more productions; productions which we hope will include many of the company of the 18th season.

—E.H.A.

## Shakespeare Would Let Viewer Review Play

We ran into Bill Shakespeare in a coffee shop in Ashland the other night. He squinted at us whimsically through the hole in his doughnut, and invited us to sit with him.

We ordered coffee, black. We told Bill our problem. "There's nothing worse than reviewing plays," he agreed. "Especially four at once. I couldn't review one. I had to take up writing them instead."

We told him we didn't think we could do it either, and to make matters worse we had a deadline.

**Forget Being Reviewer**

"Well," he said slowly, "if I were you I'd just forget that deadline for a minute. I'd forget I was a reviewer or anything else."

"I'd say to myself, look here. You've been sitting out there in that theatre time and again this summer. You thought you were watching plays. But you weren't."

"And then I'd say to myself, those weren't plays. Those were dreams you sat through. They were taking place right there in your own brain."

"And I'd say, yes, there were some actors up there on the stage, good ones too. But they were only there to inspire those dreams of yours."

**Dreams Real Plays**

"These dreams were the real plays, the ones you took away with you, free, after the actors were all through and the lights came back on and you trudged away through the crowds, under the stars."

But you can't review those, we said.

"No, maybe you can't," he replied. "Not for other people. But you can for yourself. At least you can make them live again, those dreams I'm speaking of, inside yourself. That's what re-viewing means, after all."

Maybe that's all right for us, we said, but we have to write this review for other people, our readers.

"The trouble with critics or reviewers or whatever you want to call them," Bill said, "is that they always tell people what they themselves think about this or that."

## Read Between Lines

"What they ought to do once in a while is tell their readers to read between their own lines. Tell them to review the plays and come up with their own ideas."

We sipped our coffee, and thought it over. We weren't sure what the boss would think of this.

"Besides," Bill said, "when you think you're reviewing a play for other people you seldom write what's really going on deep inside yourself."

"You write what you think you want to write, but what you don't put down, those little glimpses or phrases which keep swimming around your mind, that's what the plays really all about as far as you're concerned."

**Each Is Different**

"Just remember, they're swimming around inside other people too. Not the same ones, because for each person the play, the dream rather, is a little different."

"But why don't you try, just once, reminding people they should do the re-viewing themselves."

Maybe, just this once, we thought.

Later, driving back to Medford along Highway 99 with its drive-ins and its snack joints, we thought what a wonderful thing it was that Bill Shakespeare had come to Ashland.

He's been there 18 summers now. We hope he sticks around—E.W.

## Crater Lake Lodge To Close Sept. 10

Crater Lake National Park—Overnight accommodations at Crater Lake National park will close for the season next week, it was announced Friday by Thomas J. Williams, superintendent.

The lodge will close after the night of Sept. 9, with breakfast on the 10th being the last meal served there. Cabins will be closed after the night of Sept. 14, and the cafeteria will close after breakfast on the 15th. They will remain closed until June 15, 1959.

A light lunch will be available daily in the warming hut section of the cafeteria building as long as weather permits, probably until late October. Thereafter the warming hut will be open on Saturdays, Sundays and holidays, with lunch available, throughout the winter. The road to the rim will be kept open.

Gasoline and oil will be available in the headquarters area until Oct. 10. Thereafter it will be available at Union Creek and Prospect to the west, 24 and 35 miles from the rim, and Wilson Camp and Ft. Klamath to the south, 20 and 24 miles away.

Paint before winter

Beauty & Protect with GLIDDEN PAINT

Don't wait until cold, stormy weather is here—PAINT NOW with TOP QUALITY GLIDDEN!

5 & H Green Stamps given

FRAKE & SMITH PAINT & WALLPAPER

315 East Main • Phone SP 2-4564

Learn how to rake up your Fall bills into one bundle...



## "MONEYLAND"

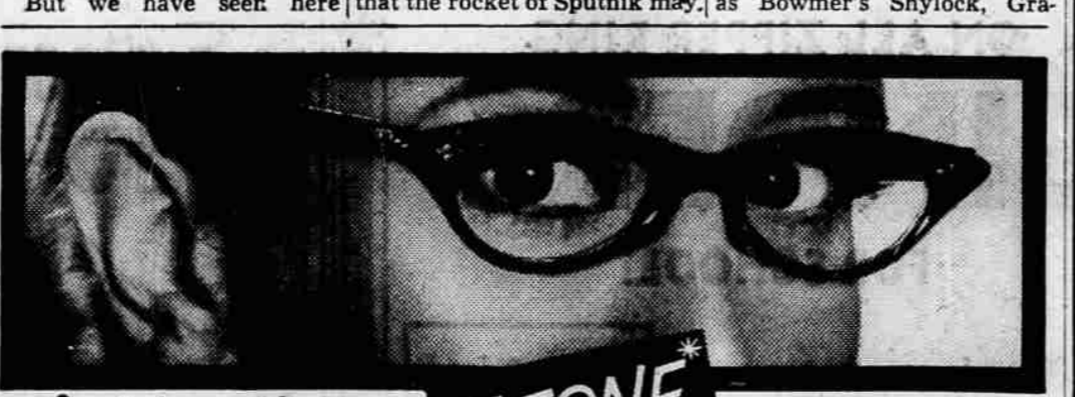
...where it's almost fun to borrow money for Fall expenses!

Come to your nearby Pacific Industrial office—"MONEYLAND" to thousands—when you need money. Whether you need extra cash to meet back-to-school or other Fall expenses... to buy appliances, to take a trip, or to cut monthly payments... PF provides prompt, courteous, financial help. Make Pacific Industrial your "MONEYLAND"—It's the place to borrow money. Call today!

**NEW FINANCING PLAN!** In addition to our personal loan service, we can now "finance" (buy contracts on) most anything you want to buy on time—automobiles, furniture, appliances, etc. Investigate competitive rates available before buying.

A DIVISION OF PACIFIC FINANCE  
**pf PACIFIC INDUSTRIAL Loans**

16 South Central • Phone SP 3-5308  
Jim Elbert, Manager



## Confidentially Yours: E-ZONE Hearing Secret

Men and women hear again with nothing in either ear through thrilling Sonotone research discovery. Only YOU will know your E-Zone\* secret of transistor hearing aid completely concealed in stylish glasses. Yet you use both ears (just as normal persons listen) to enjoy latest hearing revolution recommended by doctors. Based on Sonotone bone-conduction invention, by-passing outer ears.

## SONOTONE

C. R. ADAMSON, Manager 839 East Jackson—Phone SP 2-5904

# Here's REAL Savings

## On this New Westinghouse 30-INCH RANGE

Never before such value for your money! Westinghouse combines beauty and styling plus convenience and economy in this handsome 30-inch range with features found usually only in ranges in higher price brackets. Check these extras—and look at low, low price!

- Clock
- Minute Timer
- Surface Light
- 1001 Heat Switches
- Super Corox Units
- Spacious 23" Oven
- Storage Drawer Below
- Broiler Pan
- Many other features

**\$198<sup>00</sup>** EASY TERMS

Model BLK-30

YOU CAN BE SURE...IF IT'S Westinghouse

# Trowbridge & Flynn Electric Co.

214 West Main • Phone SP 3-6241