

'Old Wive's Tale' confusing but artistic

by ALLAN GROVER

One would want, if one could, to avoid comparing the Dramatic Arts Programme's first "major" production of this year with those presented in the past.

For one thing, the Programme has shifted its emphasis — partly due to financial necessity, partly to the fact that a good many students involved in the past have graduated, and partly because there had always been discontent with the concept of a single major production — towards more modest efforts than, for example, last year's 'The Country Wife.'

Given the grandeur of 'The Country Wife', however, it is unfortunate that director Skip Shand chose another 17th century English comedy to present this term. George Peele's 'The Old Wives Tale' did, unhappily, pale in comparison.

Comparisons aside, however, we must commend all those involved in this term's production on an excellent showing, if not an excellent performance.

'The Old Wives Tale' is essentially the story of a dirty old sorcerer who, lusting after the fair damsel Delia, places her under an enchanted spell and hides her away in the forest. Naturally, the White Knight Eumenides, her

later-to-be betrothed, and her two brothers Thelea and Calypha, not to mention a supporting cast of thousands, are looking for her.

The action follows various twists and turns, but I have yet to find anyone who could actually follow it (to be fair, the director's notes do describe the play as "really a series of small mummings or disguises). Yet one tended to find oneself listening desperately for the dirty (sorry, bawdy) jokes for which 17th century comedy is often most noted. Better half a loaf than none.

Well, would you believe a quarter loaf? The only joke I picked up occurred when the braggart Huanebango, played by Charlie Neis, entered and began to discourse in an unmistakable Brooklyn accent. The immediate and unhesitating reply: "Spoken like a true Englishman". In short, if one were to judge according to audience reaction rather than the general exuberance of the cast, the play could have as easily been a tragedy as a comic evening's entertainment.

The acting was by and large adequate, if it did break down badly in some characters. A special note should however be given of Jamie Doran, who perhaps held this production together in the dual role of

Erestus, a young lover in an old man's body, and Sacraphant, the sorcerer in the body of Erestus. His old man was a babbling fool with something important to say; the sorcerer charmingly sinister. Doran is also a master of the small gestures which compel one to follow him as he wanders across the stage. Any actor could have placed his hand on Delia's ass; few can do it with obvious class.

Special mention should also

be given of Skip Shand's stage direction. The sparse stage — one prop served alternately as a table, well and wall as it was dragged across stage as needed — plus the fact that all players remained on stage throughout the production and were forever changing costumes (most played more than one part) or readying for entrances, lent an atmosphere of involvement which was at times both interesting and invigorating.

Given the limitations of both the students involved and the play itself, 'The Old Wives Tale' was, in sum, a highly commendable production. It seems to me, however, that the Dramatic Arts Programme could do much better with more contemporary material — material which the majority of its audience could more readily understand. Hopefully the Programme will soon change at least some of its content, as well as its size.

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