

Success for Everyone In 'West Side Story'

By ALAN SLUTSKIN
Collegian Drama Critic

There is a very old proverb that says, "don't bite off more than you can chew." There is also a generally held precept among modern-day directors that says the only way to get anywhere in the theatre is to reach for the sky and not to worry about falling on your face.

The opening of "West Side Story" proves that the Thespians took a big bite, reached very high, and came away with a single broken cheekbone.



SLUTSKIN

"West Side Story" must be a candidate for one of the most perfect musicals ever written. The show incorporates song, dance, and comedy into a moving story that deals with the assimilation of Puerto Ricans into the "free country" of America, the sub-culture of teenage gangs in New York City, and, of course, young love. Simultaneously, however, it is also one of the most difficult musicals to stage ever written, and limitations such as the lack of available musicians and the physical inadequacy of Schwab Auditorium only add to the incredibility of the production that the Thespians have put together.

Perhaps most typical of the versatility achieved in this presentation, is the juxtaposition of two striking scenes. First, the alley scene, which features the song "Gee Officer Krupke," was interrupted not less than four times by sustained applause from a packed house. Bobbi Kurtz's imaginative choreography, Ned Trautman's skillful vocal direction, and director Frank Wilson's creative blocking combined to best utilize the elements of the musical and, at the same time, accentuate the light comedy that "West Side" is artistically laced with.

Depths of Emotion
The finale, though brings to the surface the depths of the human emotions that this show strives to explore. Wilson's subtle insight into the delicate manner in which this scene had to be handled was the key to the entire production. His manipulation of movement, sightlines, focus and the rhythmic crescendo that created the necessary atmosphere to receive the climax was that of an inspired technician.

Mardee Barber displayed a beautiful voice and the experience of a polished actress in her portrayal of Maria, and Sam Freed as Tony, turned out to be the best leading man the Thespians have come up with in a long time. Brad Sprankle, as Bernardo the leader of "The Sharks," came on with a little overplaying, and surpassed all others in his mastering of stage fighting and the necessary dialect.

Bolsters Pace
Gay Eger, who portrayed Anita, Bernardo's girl, was a main factor in bolstering the pacing throughout and, aided by Bobbie Jones, as Rosalia, gave the song "America" the zest to bring out the significance that its lyrics hold for the overall theme.

Although Brian Freilino had a little trouble with some of his solos, he managed to capture the character of Riff, the leader of the "Jets." Freilino visually creates the inner turmoil that drives a young boy to rasp something as unglamorous as a few blocks of slums as a manifestation of security and a meaning for life.

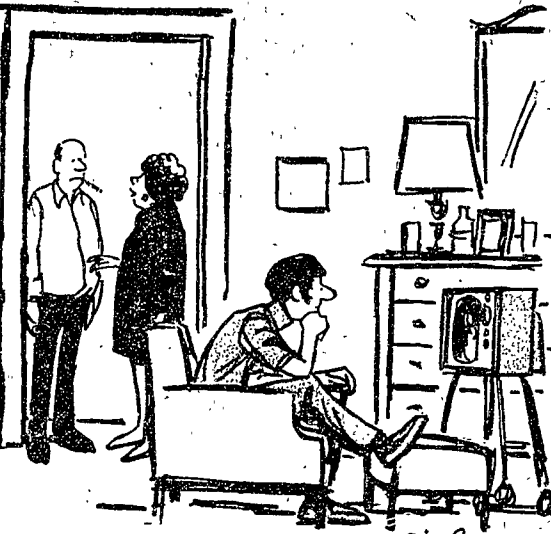
With the exceptions of Mitch Seawartz, who was a very unconvincing Lieutenant Schrank, and Dave Betts, who did very little to explore the comical possibilities of Officer Krupka, the supporting cast was more than adequate. Phyllis Ross, as Anybodys, was not only a believable tomboy, but contributed a great deal to the comedy and shows great promise as a newcomer to the Thespians.

Charles Sharp as Doc, and Roger Thomas as Baby John, were outstanding. Sharp mastered the physical requirements of age, and was potent as the representative of that generation that just isn't "hip" to the young people's problems. In a role that depicted the lighter side of the story, Thomas was by far the funniest character in the presentation.

Ups and Downs
From the technical standpoint, "West Side" had its ups and downs. For the most part, Davis Giersh's musical direction went well. Some of the renditions were a little low due to the absence of strings, but he did a fine job with the orchestration. Considering that on opening night in New York, Leonard Bernstein blew the "America" section of the overture, Giersh certainly rose to the occasion. Chris Clayton's lighting design was excellent in one or two scenes, but fairly unimaginative throughout.

Just as Miss Kurtz's choreography was the high point of the technical undertakings, so was Bob Buckler's scenic design the greatest disappointment. Aside from creating a perspective that gave the audience a feeling of the imposing presence of the characters, Buckler did little else. The sets provided the barest necessities and made no attempt to explore the scenic possibilities inherent in the scenario.

BERRY'S WORLD



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"Don't worry, as soon as everybody else is wearing long sideburns—he'll shave his off!"

Letter to the Editor

Here Are the Male/Female Ratios

TO THE EDITOR: Horray! At least one male student at PSU is willing to admit that there is discrimination against women. This is some progress. Mr. Scafetta in his letter of May 9 was very concerned about the fact that PSU needs to train engineers and scientists in order to entice industry to Pennsylvania.

He seemed to imply that women who are in education, human development and liberal arts do not contribute to the welfare of the state. Need he be reminded that it is mainly women who are responsible for the rearing and early education of young children, some of whom will be engineers and scientists?

He also states that the universities in New York, New Jersey, and Massachusetts supply the "majority of the best qualified engineers, scientists, and business people." The fact remains that in the public universities of these states the ratio of men to women resident students is less than PSU: The University of New York System 1.27:1, Rutgers the State University of New Jersey 2.1:1 and at the University of Massachusetts 1.5:1.

One cannot discuss prosperity of the various states without at once thinking of California, one of the fastest growing, both in population and industry. According to Mr. Scafetta's logic the ratio of men to women in higher education in this state should be quite high. However, in the University of California System the ratio is only 1.57:1. Educating a high proportion of women seems not to have damaged engineering education in this public institution.

A sweeping generalization made was that "most of the state universities in the South and West observe male-female admission ratios much higher than PSU's low 2.5:1." This is simply not true. One need only check the publications by the Department of Health, Education and Welfare on enrollments in higher education to determine this. For example, the Universities of Arizona, Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, Tennessee, California, Colorado State University, Louisiana State University, Montana State University, and Washington State University all have ratios less than 2:1. The Universities of Wyoming, Arkansas, Florida, and West Virginia have ratios approximately 2:1. The University of Idaho has a ratio of 2.3:1. Admittedly there is one that is much worse than PSU — Mississippi State University with 4:1.

It is difficult to consider all this "foolish talk" as Mr. Scafetta suggests. For some reason it bothers me that in Twentieth Century America there are still people who feel that men, regardless of qualifications, are more entitled to an education than women.

Letter Cut

Carmen Vance
Graduate Student

'November' Uneven, 'Pawnbroker' Powerful

By PAUL SEYDOR
Collegian Film Critic

"Sweet November" is the story of Sara, a young woman who will eventually die from an incurable (and unnamed) illness. To make the most of her short life, she lets a different man live with her each month, while she cures whatever psychological hang-ups her hangers-on have. November's occupant — Charlie, a young executive who's always in a hurry—turns into something special. She falls in love with him, and he with her.

Now this sounds like a nice enough premise — despite the hackneyed incurable illness device — for a delicate, fragile, and even tragic film. Unfortunately, "Sweet November" misses by a fair margin. A shame really, because most of its faults could have been avoided so easily.

For starters, the choice of Sandy Dennis as Sara is a fatal one. The part obviously calls for a Shirley MacLaine. Miss Dennis, even worse than in "The Fox," continues to substitute manner for matter, style for substance. It seems an impossibility for her to finish a sentence without stuttering once or twice. Her hands flit all over the place, her mouth pouts, her chin wrinkles. Her characters, buried beneath a plethora of mannerisms, rarely come alive.

Conviction and Warmth
Anthony Newley as Charlie lends conviction and warmth to a sometimes poorly-written role. For instance, the scriptwriters render his initial fascination with Sara not at all convincing. Nor, I'm afraid, does calling him a frustrated poet (circa 1940, it was always a musician) help much.

There is, of course, a stereotyped friend for Sara: Alonzo, The Only One Who Really Understands, given a wooden performance by Theodore Bikel.

Worst of all, the music score, complete

with a soupy wordless-chorus, seems lifted from a Claudette Colbert ladies-romance. Thus, many potentially tender scenes are drenched in molasses once that sickening chorus oozes through the speakers.

Yet, as incredible as it may seem, with all the turgidity working against them, the writers manage to create a sincere and convincing love story. We believe in Sara's and Charlie's deep and abiding love for one another. And because of this, the sad ending in which they part seems only an affection of sadness. The result, of course, is maudlin. Sara's reasoning—"I want him to remember me as I am now, not when I die"—is feeble. Charlie's sudden decision to leave (a total change of mind within about two to three minutes) is ill-motivated.

It is hard to accept both the relationship as presented and the ending. They don't jive. We keep telling ourselves that she has found her meaning in him, that the point of Charlie's resoluteness is his desire to share her destiny.

"Sweet November" could have been a poignantly bittersweet love story. As it stands, it is by turns rather amusing, slightly touching, but mostly sentimental. Now playing at the State Theatre.



SEYDOR

"The Pawnbroker"

Regrettably, time, or more accurately, lack thereof, prevents me from giving "The Pawnbroker" the comprehensive kind of analysis it so richly deserves. Suffice it to say, if this story of a New York Jew, who allows his victimization by the Nazis to alienate him from all of humanity, just misses drama, it is nevertheless melodrama of the very highest order indeed.

Sidney Lumet's stunning direction—the highpoint of which is the brilliant use of a rather commonplace flashback technique—captures the naked reality and disgusting vulgarity of the protagonist's New York neighborhood. Rod Steiger, in unquestionably the finest performance of his distinguished career, draws the main character with depth and understanding.

It is sad that this film in its first release received such a mediocre reception from public and critics alike. "The Pawnbroker" is a gripping emotional experience, emerging as one of the most powerful motion pictures of recent years.

Tonight is the final showing at Twelve-tees. If you missed it the first time around, don't make the same mistake now.

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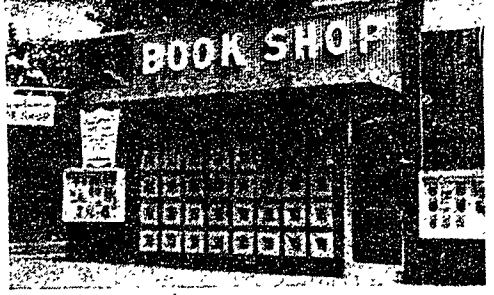


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