

# Matchbox Players turn mistakes into laughter

*"The Coarse Acting Show" plays on common theatrical difficulties*

by Rob Prindle

**The Coarse Acting Show**  
by Michael Green  
Wednesday, April 4 - Saturday, April 7.  
Studio Theatre - 8:00 pm.

In the tradition of Monty Python? No, not even close. In fact the only thing that The Coarse Acting Show and Python have in common is English accent. Not everything that weighs the same as a duck is a witch.

But it was an enjoyable enough night of comedy theater with a new (at least to me) concept. Coarse acting, as the director explained before the show, is a combination of bad acting, missed cues, faulty props, out of synch dialog and just about any other faux pas that could come about on stage. All of this can be extremely funny, but as you can imagine, all of this chaos on stage can also get tiring.

Each actor in the cast had an English Thespian type name (Neville Blanchard, Johnathan Mortimer Swift, etc.) Now this gets a bit complicated. The actors stayed in their thespian characters through five short plays of very

differing themes: A murder mystery, a Chekov type drama, a Shakespearian drama, a progressive french interpretative/experimental piece and finally I think what what was supposed to be farce. The idea here was an acting troop putting on a night of theater.

For the most part each actor kept his major role (that of an English actor) straight through all of the different short plays, although I have no idea how. The last play I saw with so many costume changes was "Greater Tuna" and that play only dealt with three actors. There were hundreds of Behrend students in this play, and several sets. Even one of the plays within the play had several acts. I think that director Stephen Buckwald is a masochist.

But one thing that must have made it easier for the cast and crew was the very nature of what they were doing. Mistakes were the theme, so if someone screwed up who was going to know? This play never stopped between the acts (or sub-plays?) the set changes were even intended to be funny.

Some of the funnier on-purpose mistakes were: all of the actors being stuck on stage and

trying to blend in with the scenery; an actor trying to make the best out of a tea urn that wouldn't shut off; and two actors making the best of being trapped in a huge salt shaker.

If this all sounds hectic and sweaty, just imagine adding blown lines, props being moved out of place or not being present

the highlight of my favorite sub-play "The Cherry Sisters." I've never seen her act before, but I'm thinking she should get a lot of attention in the future.

Another real treat in this play was Pat Hopwood playing an old hag fond of falling trees. Her whined editorials were hilarious, and her heckling laugh was right on.

Pat was also exquisite in "All's Well That Ends As You Like It" as a balloon busted matron, fond of recalling those who had suckled at her ample breast.

Don Hopwood gave a good solid performance all the way through. He was called upon many times to be the backbeat of the comedy, but even as a focus character, Don was an interesting presence on stage. His finest moment came as the character Piles, an elderly butler, but he also excelled in a very different role in "Last Call for Breakfast" the ultra experimental piece (which, by the way, made very fine use of the Pink Floyd oldie "Several Small Furry Animals..."). Don, along with Stephane Dorian, gave frighteningly strange performances as super sensitive slow-motion mimes.

Other actors worth watching include Bill Gibbard, especially in the experimental piece. Bill is an actor with incredible energy and this is really the only place in the play where he was allowed to use it, although he played well throughout the evening.

Clay Robeson and Tammy Furiesz both performed well with what I thought was ailing material.

And although this play did have many high points, there were also some flaws. Some of the actors, it was clear, did not understand the humor that they were trying to create. The play went way, way, way, way too long at two and a half hours. It started to lose the audience, and how many times is a falling wall funny? The introductions between plays didn't work at all. The smoke machine almost killed several elderly members of the audience and I didn't understand one important point. Were the plays within the play supposed to be serious or is part of coarse acting also coarse writing?

This play was a tremendous undertaking and the kind of experimentation that college theater needs, but I still have one question. How did the players learn all of that stuff?

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at all, inappropriate lighting moves and lots of slap stick. We are talking about total chaos and a very different theatrical production.


There were some stand out performances and stand out moments in this very long production.

Sue Nichols played a superbly funny innocent. She was clearly

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