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MEETINGS / LECTURES

Thu 3rd

THURSDAY LUNCHEON TALK - The Cure of One Soul - Rev Michael Brierley, Bishop's Chaplain / 12.30pm - Free / secretary@st-giles-church.org / www.st-giles-church.org / St Giles Church.
TERRORISM AND INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATION / Prof. Sir Adam Roberts, KCMG / UNA Oxford Branch / 5.30pm - 6.45pm, all welcome / Wesley Memorial Hall, New Inn Hall Street, Tel: 243216

CONTEMPORARY PRINTS / Talk on the Ashmolean's collection, Dr Chris Rümelin, Assistant Keeper / Young Friends of the Ashmolean / 5pm, £2 for non-members / Ashmolean Museum, Tel: 278000
WINTER LECTURE SERIES / brings together leading gardeners and garden designers to give their perspective on gardening / 8pm, £9 / Nelson Mandela Auditorium, Said Business School

OXFORD STUNT FACTORY / Gravity & Extreme Sports club at Oxford & Brookes universities / 7pm The Pub Oxford, The Plain / enquiries@oxfordstuntfactory.com
INFORMAL GET-TOGETHERS / Meet for a drink and a chat / Oxford Vegetarians 6-8pm / The Mitre, High St. / www.iva.org.uk/oxvege/events/index.htm

Fri 4th

THE UNCEASING QUEST / Retrospective of the search for higher meaning Zen/Yoga/Kabala, Buddha / and Quantum physics... / 19.30, £5/£2 / unceasing@mtworld.com / venue TBA, call 07968 707770 for details

CUMNOR CHORAL SOCIETY REHEARSAL / Weekly rehearsal of Stainer's Crucifixion, Tenors and Basses wanted / 7.30 to 9.30pm / Ann.willmott@btinternet.com / The Chapel, Westminster Institute of Education, Harcourt Hill Campus

THEATRE REVIEW

La Chunga

9.30pm, Burton-Taylor until Sat 5th March

La Chunga is a simple (or comparatively simple) story, set in a low bar on the outskirts of Piura - a city in the north of Peru. The bar is owned and run by the eponymous La Chunga (Christina Paul), and frequented by a quartet of ne'er do wells who call themselves 'the Champions'. These four men waste their time in the bar, drinking and gambling, while La Chunga looks on with disdain.

The story begins with the four wastrels engaged in their usual pastimes. Sitting in the bar, playing at dice, and getting extraordinarily drunk. They also attempt to prise from their hostess the full story of the events that took place a year previously. One year ago, Josephino (Aaron Costa-Ganis), effective ringleader of the group, arrived in the bar with a lady called Meche (Elizabeth Kiernan). La Chunga took to the girl immediately, and when the rather hideous Josephino lost heavily at dice, she agreed to loan him money to stay in the game, in return for a night with the girl.

What the two women actually got up to over this night is never revealed, rather we are shown the theories, speculations, and fantasies of the four men in the story about what may have transpired. Needless to say, there is a certain quantity of - and why waste a perfectly good chance to use the term - hot girl-on-girl action involved (nothing terribly graphic or gratuitous, but enough to make That Sort of Thing a significant theme of the play). Several alternative hypotheses are also presented, each one essentially the speculations, desires or fears of one or another of the protagonists.

The set design is minimalist - most of the characters never moving from the one table at which they seem to spend their entire lives. Apart from that there's a bar and a bed, and that's about it. The dialogue is naturalistic, and as a result there are few truly sparkling lines or exchanges. I understand that the play was originally written in Spanish, and sometimes the translation shows a little, lines have that "should sound better" feel that you sometimes get. The effect is exacerbated by the somewhat hit-and-miss Hispanic accents in which the characters speak, making the dialogue occasionally hard to follow.

The cast all hold their own in their roles. The characters of José (Richard Greenberg), El Mono (Neil Boyd) and Lituma (Harry Ullman) have significantly less to do than the other three characters, spending a lot of time in the background. Aaron Costa-Ganis is suitably offensive as Josephino, and Elizabeth Kiernan is charmingly vulnerable as Meche. Christina Paul gives a fine performance in the title role, displaying genuine stage presence. She comes across as strong, cynical, and really rather sexy.

Overall, it's a decent show. Like many plays shown at the Burton Taylor, it is a low-budget student production, and so the occasional rough edge is to be expected, but the premise is strong, and the story is entertaining. It is certainly worth taking a look if you're short for something to do of an evening.

Daniel Hemmens, 1/03/05

THEATRE
Until Sat 5th March

Oxford Playhouse (305305)
A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE Thu 3 & Sat 5: 2.30pm & 7.30pm, Fri 4: 8pm
New Theatre (0870 6063500)
THE OXFORD GANG SHOW Mon 28th - Sat 5th: daily: 7.30pm
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Burton Taylor Theatre (305305)
WOMAN IN MIND Tue 1st - Sat 5th: 7.30pm
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LA CHUNGA Tue 1st - Sat 5th: 9.30pm
A subversive and dark world of female passion and male repression. £45
Pegasus Theatre (722851)
SEEKING IS BELIEVING Fri 4th: 8pm
Unusual show involving audience participation via mobile phones. £5.50 - £3.50
Old Fire Station (297170)
PYGMALION Tue 1st - Sat 5th: 7.30pm; also Sat 5th: 2.30pm
A darker look at Bernard Shaw's comedy. £8.50-£5.50
BMW Group Plant (245745)
THE COMEDY OF ERRORS until Sat 5th: 2.00pm, 7.30pm
Shakespeare in the Mirror. Tel: 850-1950 Mon-Fri: 7.30pm-Sat: 2.00pm, 7.30pm
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SPARKY'S FLYING CIRCUS / Performers of all kinds welcome! Free / 9pm / The Half Moon, 17 St Clements, Oxford
PEACE AND DUB / Reggae night featuring infamous Sundance Kid, Mayday favourite / 8.30, 11 Free / Elm Tree, Cowley Rd
THE SPIN JAZZ CLUB / John Etheridge - ex Soft Machine, Andy Summers - guitar giant / £7.50 conc / Open 7.45pm, band on 8.30pm / The Spina/The Wheatheaf, Wheatheaf Alley, 129 High Street, Tel: 243276; www.spinjazz.com

Fri 4th
OXFORD FOLK CLUB / BEN PALEY & TAB HUNTER: from Appalachian to Klezmer on fiddle & guitar / 8.30-11.00, £3.50 (u/w £2.50) / pamcooper@hotmail.com / www.oxfordfolkclub.com / Port Mahon, St. Clement's
THE MAVONETTES + DOGS + THE BOXER REBELLION / 6.30pm £8.50adv / The Zodiac, 190 Cowley Road, Tel: 420042; www.the-zodiac.co.uk /
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THEATRE REVIEW

Pygmalion

7.30pm at the Old Fire Station, until Sat 5th

The Brasenose Arts student production of Pygmalion is being marketed as a "darker look" at Bernard Shaw's much-loved social satire, yet in truth it is nothing of the sort. Instead, the talented company have created an entirely faithful reading, much as one assumes Shaw would have intended.

Phoneticist Henry Higgins makes a bet that he can pass off working-class street trader Eliza Doolittle as an aristocrat simply by correcting her colloquial use of English. Initially reluctant, but desperate to escape the poverty trap in which she has found herself, Eliza agrees to play along, in the hope of securing a more rewarding social position. The experiment is a great success, but the unforeseen consequences return to haunt the professor, as Eliza comes to realise her own intellectual strengths.

Working directly from a script of exceptional wit and eloquence, the cast played for every available laugh, and were largely successful in their efforts. Indeed, the casting of the highly promising Helen Winston as Eliza was inspired, allowing the actress ample opportunity to demonstrate a genuine flair for comedy. Moving effortlessly from the brash, Hepburn-inspired flower girl to the sharper, wiser society figure engineered by Professor Higgins, Ms. Winston exuded confidence throughout, sympathetically adjusting her performance to the mood of each scene. The rest of the cast, despite being more than capable, occasionally found themselves struggling to keep up, although a commendably energetic performance by Himanshu Ojha as Higgins served to restore a little of the much-needed balance.

In a sense, it is a shame the promise of a darker version of the play proved to be unfounded. Just as My Fair Lady succeeded in lightening the tale beyond any serious worth, there is room for a greater exploration of Shaw's polemical motives. For anyone new to the play, or simply wanting to see it well performed, however, this short run may provide the ideal opportunity.

Jim Batty, 1/03/05

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