

ANIMAL FARM. By George Orwell, Adapted by Peter Hall, Lyrics by Adrian Mitchell, Music by Richard Peaslee. Bailiwick Repertory. Chicago, Illinois. November, 1987-January, 1988.

The message of George Orwell's *Animal Farm* is not very far under the surface. The metaphor of a farm animal revolution which goes wrong when certain of the pigs manipulate the democratic process can wear very thin in a hurry. Peter Hall and England's National Theatre looked in the direction of music to sustain the satire. With Richard Peaslee and Adrian Mitchell they had a formidable team. They were, after all, responsible for the music and verse adaptation of Peter Brook's *Marat/Sade*, a work not at all out of keeping with the Orwell classic.

Bailiwick Repertory has given the satirical fairy tale an excellent mounting with brilliantly conceived and engineered costumes/masks, good casting and imaginative direction, but the simple predictability of the action still overwhelms us, and the music and lyrics never take on the task of carrying either the story or the satire. Time and time again the songs, with their significance or lack of it betrayed by titles such as Muriel's Song, The Boulder Song, Work Song, Winter Song, and Nothing Song, give us only a gloss on a part of the situation which needs no further elaboration. The exceptions, such as No Man, No Master, The Hen's Revolt, and This Isn't What We Wanted, can't take up the slack in what becomes a very long evening.

Peter Hall's adaptation must be charged with a large measure of the responsibility for the disappointing final product. He has chosen to retain a narrative framework, with an on stage reader picking up a prop book to begin the proceedings. Such a device in itself is not unacceptable, but the adaptation retains a totally retrospective point of view throughout, so that the audience is never involved in anticipating what will happen next, or even how the characters will cope with what we know is coming. Denied the activity of discovery, the audience is reduced to passive witness to what is after all a very depressing image of the prospects for democratic process and self determination.

The Bailiwick Repertory production received well deserved plaudits for creative solutions to the problems of playing animal characters. The use of articulated crutches for the front legs of the hoofed characters was a matter of continued fascination, and the mixture of puppetry, mask and mime gave the production a flavor of sustained theatricality. As successful as these effects were, they nevertheless failed to provide the kind of targets for the satire that was needed to give the audience a sense that the general metaphor had specific applications of immediate significance. Recognition of the

applications might have gotten the audience involved in feeling the bite of the satire. But the dogs were just dogs, the pigs just pigs, and there were no attempts to invoke the Chicago Police Department, the City Council, the Contras or the Sandinistas, to mention just a few potential targets. In the Bailiwick *Animal Farm* the abstraction of Orwell remained on the one level that Peter Hall provides. The audience grasps that straw early on, and for the remainder of the evening must be contented with appreciating a skillful performance. The problem faced here is not an easy one. Many of us are tired of the bungled attempts of directors to make the productions of classical plays relevant to our times by contemporization through costume, setting, use of multi-media or wholesale rewriting. We yearn for the chance to find the relevance ourselves in the full texture of the original rather than narrowing distortions of production team. But in the case of *Animal Farm* the utter simplicity of the tale gives the audience too much leeway. We can use some prompting to get our imaginations working. We know the animals are to be taken metaphorically, but we need the clues that bring us out of the English countryside into the post-industrial world of the 80's before we feel the sting of satire that Orwell hopes will keep us vigilant.

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THE DIARY OF ANNE FRANK. By Francis Goodrich and Albert Hackett. Milwaukee Repertory Theatre. Milwaukee, Wisconsin. December 3, 1987-January 10, 1988.

Scheduling this production in December meant that the MRT faced the problem of a reluctance on the part of audience to deal with the material of the Anne Frank story in the midst of preparations for the holidays. Artistic director John Dillon wrote an effective justification for the timing in the subscribers magazine, citing the Chanukah scene and the empathy it generates for those who are forced by circumstance to live with little or nothing. Whether the notes were effective in overcoming the problem is not certain, but there was no doubt that the audience was conscious of the matter, and it was a factor for good or bad.

Another task faced by the production team was that of recreating the claustrophobic Amsterdam loft setting on their new thrust stage with its 180 degrees of audience arc. Designer Jeffrey Struckman provided director Kent Stephens with a cluttered main room