



Brewing With Yeast

MILWAUKEE.

HOW DOES a repertory company keep its vitality? This is not a simple question, but the Milwaukee Repertory Theatre seems to have found some of the answers. To begin with, the company's new artistic director, Tunc (pronounced Toonch) Yalman, has both an internationally sophisticated knowledge of the standards a first-class company must meet, and a deep-seated belief in the function theater should perform. The aim of the theater, he says, is to turn the observer into a participant by making him recognize what is true and eternal in dramas of all periods.

Thus Mr. Yalman was able to score a success with his boldly chosen first production, Sophocles's *Electra*, performed in modern dress. And the whole season to date has set a new high attendance record of 92 per cent capacity. The young Turkish-born director is quick to admit, however, that whatever success he has enjoyed is due to other factors as well. There was his good luck in assembling a skilled company that happened to work well together. There is a board of directors which raises a projected \$130,000 annual deficit (one-half of the total budget), and which accepts the principle of noninterference in artistic policy. And, finally, there is MRT's Theater for Tomorrow Studio Series which presents new plays by living American playwrights under a \$25,000 Rockefeller grant. These new plays are performed twice a week at times when the theater would ordinarily be dark. Their most important effect may not be so much to help the new playwright, who sees his play performed and receives a few hundred dollars in royalties, but to feed the vitality of both the actors and the eager core of audience supporters who attend and discuss these imperfect and unrenowned works.

On a recent trip, this writer had the unusual experience of attending a student matinee of *The Merchant of Venice* and at 5:30 seeing many of the same actors performing Doug Taylor's *The Sudden and Accidental Re-education of Horse Johnson*. The Shakespeare comedy offered a hauntingly poetic Shylock by Boris Tumarin, and managed to capitalize on Portia's outwitting of Shylock's vengeful intent at the same time that it underlined Shylock's justification for despising Antonio. Director Eugene Lesser interpolated into the action a wordless reunion between Shylock and his daughter, and at the end of the trial

scene the moneylender was cruelly spat upon. These touches serve to increase our sympathy for Shylock.

An hour later a half-capacity audience assembled around the same arena stage appeared to enjoy the Taylor play, which is being given its first full performance here. It presents a very human situation in which Horse Johnson, a warehouse worker, has quit his job in order to study Emerson and Whitman. While he may not be literate enough to understand what he is reading, it turns out that in a primitive, intuitive way he is getting something out of it. Thus he is able to survive a number of rude awakenings.

The play, intelligently directed by Robert Benedetti, suffers from a frequent fluctuation between naturalism and satirical exaggeration. Still, as played by Michael Fairman and Mary Jane Kimbrough, Horse Johnson and his wife do capture our concern and the play emerges as a memorable experience.

Although the playwright wrote the work with actor Jack Klugman in mind—and indeed had had the prior experience of hearing his play read by Klugman, Kathleen Maguire, and others at last summer's Eugene O'Neill Memorial Theater Foundation Playwrights Conference—the experience of full production by a young, eager company in front of a paid audience was invaluable to

him. Here, unlike the three Broadway producers who had held options on the work, Theater for Tomorrow took the script as it stood and went ahead without asking for rewrites or waiting for the ideal actors to play the roles.

Mr. Taylor, a former actor and TV writer, has written three other plays which are awaiting production. His unveiling here suggests that as soon as he finds a certain exact distance to maintain between the real and the satirical, he could emerge as a fine playwright. Whether he does or not, he and the Milwaukee Repertory Theatre have had an invigorating adventure.

ELSEWHERE around the country, Memphis's Front Street Theater has come up with a delightfully earthy production of Molière's *The Miser*. Directed by Carl Weber and featuring Al Corbin as a dry old tightwad and Karen Grassle as his deliciously seductive daughter, it entertains in a most modern way.

At Baltimore's Center Stage, director Douglas Seale has attempted a modern dress version of Shakespeare's seldom-played *Titus Andronicus*. The first act is unsparing in its pursuit of violence, with Robert Geringer portraying Titus as a stern Nazi general. Those who can survive Act I's punishment are then treated to a second act in which Titus's madness is deeply explored. Graham Brown stands out in a Black Muslim version of the evil-embracing Aaron. And the rest of the company work together with fierce concentration to relate this ancient chamber of horrors to our time.

—HENRY HEWES.



JACOB EPSTEIN:

A True Romantic

WHILE IN LONDON during 1960, Edward Schinman, a New Jersey businessman, was persuaded by his wife to steal a few hours from work and accompany her to the Tate Gallery, where an exhibition of Jacob Epstein's sculpture was on view. From that moment Mr. Schinman was hooked. He had never collected or even been interested in modern art before. "I was so impressed," he said, "I couldn't think. Epstein's carvings and bronzes seemed to talk to me. At that time we had no idea they could be purchased."

After returning to Wayne, New Jersey, where Mr. Schinman lives, he was unable to shake Epstein's images from his mind, so back to London he went, and with dedicated devotion began acquiring the artist's work. Now, less than eight years later, he owns the largest and most comprehensive Epstein collection in the world, as evidenced by the current exhibition at Fairleigh Dickinson University in Rutherford, New Jersey—an exhibition, by the way, that closes shortly. On view are 140 works, including bronze and stone sculpture, drawings, watercolors, and one oil painting, reputedly and wisely Sir Jacob's only known effort in this medium.

The exhibition proves that Epstein was first, last, and always a sculptor. His best drawings, almost invariably preliminary sketches for bronzes or stone carvings, have a springy viability, an assurance and élan sadly lacking in the watercolors, which are often over-explicit. Sir Jacob was rarely a colorist, though a few flower still lifes recall the explosive radiance of Nolde. It is, however, the heavy-handed watercolors of nudes and landscapes that indicate how alien Epstein found the painter's brush.

Eighty-three bronzes focus on the artist at his best—a best sometimes underrated in America. The exuberant bronze portraits and small, taut, quivering bronze nudes are a testament to the artist's genius for investing clay with expressive content. And, to be sure, it is always Expressionism that underlies Epstein's work, a fact which may explain why he excelled in a spontaneous medium like clay but faltered when he attacked the more formal problems of stone. The speed of his eye, the nervous intuition of his

hand were hampered by the laborious process of carving.

A true romantic, Epstein explored and exploited every nuance of human expression, searching for individual meaning in faces, hands, hair, and even in external adornment. Often beards, curls, and coils of hair detach themselves, and, coming to life with snake-like vehemence, characterize the personality of the sitter. Though he was born in America and lived most of his adult years in England, Sir Jacob seems entirely a European artist, influenced more by Rodin, Negro art, and the School of Paris than by Anglo-Saxon memories. One of the few twentieth-century sculptors to pursue the mysteries of portraiture, he remained essentially loyal to earlier traditions, and this despite the furor he occasioned in Britain. Indeed, when he tried to abandon the past he was least successful. One thinks of his vorticist drawings where academic neatness substituted for the excitement of Italian Futurism.

Today we try to understand why England reeled at each successive Epstein onslaught. It was the stone and marble carvings that upset the public, rarely the portraits. Now we look at these carved figures (there are several in the Schinman collection) and realize that the British were offended less by technical innovations than by savage symbolism. Like numerous colleagues in Paris, Epstein borrowed from primitive African sculpture. His hope was to emphasize generic meanings through favorite themes like those that inspired the works, *Maternity*, *Genesis*, and

Elemental Man. At times the stone carvings are convincing in their heavy brutality, but more often they tend to be mannered, linear, and overstated.

In contrast, Epstein's small bronze nudes and portraits avoid philosophic pretense and deal with the specific, with his own direct experience. Here one feels the sculptor's hands at work; one feels his electric presence hovering over images that are in part autobiographical. Yet when he tried for monumentality, he often ended up with a rigid tour de force, with large stone carvings that are curiously frozen and pompous.

To compare the tender head, *Baby Awake*, done in Paris before 1905, with the later likeness of Epstein's own child, *Peggy Jean Laughing*, is to understand the sculptor's steady progression toward freer working methods. The early bronze—smooth, simplified, and restrained—becomes a haunting generalization of all babies, but *Peggy Jean Laughing* is an individualized child caught at a specific moment. Hair, open mouth, heavy cheeks, and asymmetrical features vibrate with life and yet there is no attempt to suggest more than an overall impression.

Like Rodin, Epstein broke up the surface of his bronzes so that light both invigorates and transforms them. Deep clefts forge exaggerated shadows that dramatize these pliant, roughly-kneaded heads and charge them with volatile emotions. Yet one senses the underlying structure of jutting chin and sloping shoulder. Take, for example, the bold Slavic features and strong torso of *Girl from Baku*. More contained but no less tense is the likeness of Haile Selassie, his robes, hands, and face all combined in an elegant evocation of authority. Each Epstein portrait is, above all, the study of a personality. From each emanates the quality of the sitter, but also from each emanates the ardent sensibility of the artist himself. He comes across with astonishing intensity.

A word about the installation and the catalogue: The exhibition is so incredibly crowded as to destroy the meaning of sculpture and make three-dimensional viewing impossible. Lined up like bargain-counter trophies, these aggressive heads destroy each other on a sea of pedestals. The catalogue, too, is unworthy of the collection. Sizes, media, and dates are often omitted, but far more alarming is the wholesale borrowing, word for word, of Richard Buckle's text from his book, *Jacob Epstein, Sculptor*. To make matters worse, no acknowledgement of any sort is evident. Both the Schinman collection and Fairleigh Dickinson University merit serious scholarship or, at the very least, adequate professional know-how.

—KATHARINE KUH.



Epstein's *Baby Awake*