

THEATRE X: 'UNNAMED' TERROR & BEAUTY

There is on Water Street, tucked away in one of its more remote corners, a stiff old building, unprepossessing in nature save for the mysterious X painted on its window. On one side the neon splendor of "downtown." Above it stretches a sign labeled "Broadway". Caught as it is between the weary hum of factory and freeway to the north and the droning bustle of the city to the south, this building becomes a natural enclave wherein one finds respite from those other, more noxious worlds. Indeed, this building serves that very purpose on most any night. Here in comfortable intimacy are witnessed art and photography shows, poetry readings, concerts and plays. The building is the Water Street Theater.

What better place to retreat to on a cold winter night than this eerie old building—to be chilled and thrilled by the superb Theatre X rendering of an H. P. Lovecraft tale? Many of us made the pilgrimage; more of us should have. Theatre X's magnificent production of "The Unnamed" closed last weekend. Now, too late, we shout its virtue, and for this the Bugle apologizes; the losses of our fire multiply.

In adapting Lovecraft to the stage, the temptation is to visually depict all the fantastic and horrifying elements of the story for the sake of dramatic sensation. The play could easily become a succession of visual stunts and gimmicks to wow the audience with a sort of Disney World-designed fright. Fortunately for us, Theatre X does not begin to succumb to this temptation.

In the writing and staging of "The Unnamed," Theatre X has been absolutely faithful to the content and style of Lovecraft. The play is based on "The Haunter of the Dark," typical of Lovecraft's stories in its manner of blending horror with atmospheric beauty, while remaining scientifically credible. Lovecraft insists on a dispassionate examination of the events surrounding the death of one Robert Blake events which might be explained perfectly logically but which, of course, are open to all kinds of alarming interpretations. Theatre X, in setting this up dramatically, uses three actors in a sort of chorus. This chorus of three people (who alternately become players in the story and muses of Blake) assumes a documentary, television news-reportage style when addressing the audience on the "facts" of the case. The brilliance of this play is that the grim possibilities beyond the "facts" are instantly transmitted to the audience by the actors' sudden shifts into their other roles—voices of terror for Blake, crying towns-

people, etc. Simple black clothes, disconcerting make-up and exaggerated facial expressions increase the tension—and the feeling that the reporter guise is a mockery of the audience.

The fourth actor in the play is Blake himself. In Lovecraft's story, Blake speaks only through his diary. Likewise, in the play, all of Blake's addresses to the audience are in the form of recitations from his diary, although here the effect is strengthened in that the audience can witness Blake going through the motions and anguish of his terrifying discoveries while he is relating them. This naturally sets up an even more sympathetic climate for Blake than is possible in Lovecraft's original story, hence, reinforcing the tales more fearful aspects.

Lovecraft describes the surroundings of his characters in the minutest of detail. Theatre X has wisely left all the surface detail to the audience's imagination. Props are minimal and merely suggestive. The high corners of the drab, old Water Street building lend themselves well to Blake's flashlight explorations of deserted places; one can almost smell the ancient must that Blake describes.

Add to the above the crowning touch of Sigmund Snopek's music, and the result is a masterpiece of terror and beauty. There is in the quality of Snopek's music a suggestion of other worlds, alien and powerful. Electronics, piano and voices blend in eerie contemplation of weird possibilities. The music is woven so successfully into the action of the play that the observer fails to notice when the music begins or ends, but is aware only that a particular moment of terror has been effectively heightened. Anyone familiar with the haunting, musical-spatial trips of Snopek realizes there could be no better choice to score Lovecraft.

Finally there are the actors themselves.

John Schneider as Robert Blake is a powerhouse of energy. Schneider skillfully draws the audience into his formidable world in a deceiving display of rational behavior, gentle smiles and calm reveries. By the time he finally unleashes his terror in a frenzy of ravings and contortions, the audience is ready to snap with him.

Arleen Kalenich, Flora Coker and John Kishline form the surrounding chorus to Schneider. Each perfectly complements the others. The actors move with such incredible precision that their disjointed movements and words become one fluid image. The drama unfolds so ef-

fortlessly as a result of their togetherness that only occasionally is one aware of the stupendous achievement of stage engineering this represents.

In all aspects of its production of "The Unnamed," Theatre X has brilliantly demonstrated its wisdom, taste and creativity. Certainly this is one of the finest groups of actors around. Don't miss their next production.

Joyce Borden



Jean Harlow meets Billy the Kid for a duel of sexual politics in Michael McClure's "The Beard," at Theatre X March 21-24 at 8:30.

The highly successful and critically acclaimed Chicago production of Michael McClure's controversial play, "The Beard" will be offered at Milwaukee's Theatre X for a special three-day run from Friday, March 21 through Sunday, March 23. Curtain time for all three performances is 8:30 p.m. Tickets are priced at \$3, or \$2 for students.