

Theatre

Charing Cross Road an evocative event

By JOHN SOMMER
Herald Special

Helene Hanff, a New York writer, and Frank Doel, a London book seller of antiquarian books, exchange letters for 20 years. She orders certain books, and he hunts them up for her. Slowly a friendship and something like love develops between the two.

The writer longs to travel to England, but never manages. Something always prevents her. When Frank Doel suddenly dies, she makes a book from their correspondence. The book is a bestseller, and the money earned from it finally enables her to fly to England.

It's hard to believe that this simple story would make a good evening at the theatre, but it does. The stage version of Helene Hanff's book "84, Charing Cross Road" consists of these letters, spoken by the characters, living far away from each other, but sharing a stage. The letters are quite ordinary, nothing unusual happens, nor are the thoughts the letter-writers express, in any way striking. And yet, as one listens to these exchanges, one is caught in the writers lives, and one wishes they could meet, but they never do.

I think this modest, little play, taken almost unchanged from "real life", is proof, that the biographies of people don't have to be extraordinary to be interesting. There is pathos in ordinary life. People get born, they walk this planet for some years, and they die. Millions of existences are never recorded anywhere, except in the most rudimentary documents.

Now, something as simple as this play by no means easy to perform. It takes a lot of care from the director to "calm" the actors for this play, because overacting would kill it. While this is not the greatest possible production of this play, the director, Neville Worsnop, has done well with it.

Lois Fraser, as Helene Hanff, is rather younger than the original, but her longing for the England she knows from books only, is rendered with conviction and charm, and a lively wit.

Ashley Windsor plays Frank Doel a bit too old and fussy in the early scenes, but he gets it right

later on, and the sight of the elderly man, waiting gallantly for the woman who has lit a warm fire in his heart, is very moving.

The stage design is good, but could be even better if the shop windows of the bookstore would show the change of seasons in the city. Only once are these windows used to that effect, when, one New Year's Eve, big snowflakes drift past the glass, and Frank sits at his desk, wrapped in his overcoat, writing to Helene.

Helene's bohemian quarters are nicely suggested with a desk and a sofa and cushions. In the store, a huge packing crate bothered me after a while. Would that thing stand there, in everybody's way for 20 years?

Aside from the two leads, other actors had small, supporting roles.

Sue Cranford, Shiona Watson, Ron Hunt, Rick Knight, and Joan Andrews filled them well.

Maureen Walker, in her first stage appearance read the letter, announcing Frank's death, in an even, unbelieved voice, that made the message more poignant. Close to 40 people helped the producer, Dorothy Hunt, to get everything ready in time.

The Georgetown Little Theatre has scheduled four more performances of "84, Charing Cross Road", for tonight (Wednesday) Thursday, Friday and Saturday at the John Elliott Theatre in Georgetown.

Tickets are available at the John Elliott Theatre box office or at Royal LePage Real Estate offices, 170 Guelph Street, Georgetown.



In true British fashion the English contingent of the Georgetown Little Theatre production "84 Charing Cross Road" break for afternoon tea during a performance of the play. Cast members include (front row, left to right) Ashley Windsor who plays Frank Doel, Shiona Watson playing Megan Wells, Susan Cranford playing Cecily Far and (backrow) Rick Knight playing Bill Humphries. The play continues tonight Wednesday through to Mar. 2, 8 p.m. at the John Elliott Theatre in Georgetown. (Herald photo)

"THE POSTAGE BLOWOUT"



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February 15, 1991

We at The Delrex Smoke Shop would like to thank The Herald in helping us to inform the public of our new postal outlet located in the store.

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