

Playwright Elton touches on most of the disputes and controversies surrounding the many issues concerning violence in the movies with compelling effectiveness, however, in a somewhat unnecessary postscript, the play's striking denouement is undercut by a needless cast summation. Now playing through June 5. (My Grade: 4)

NOISES OFF

Review by Norm Gross

At the Lyric Stage Company of Boston is their new production of "Noises Off," Michael Frayn's acclaimed, highly-inventive 1983 London and New York comic success. Its focus is on six second-rate British actors who are on tour in England performing a silly sex farce entitled, "Nothing On." Act One takes place early, on a Monday evening in January, in the remote community of Weston-Super-Mare; Act Two, on a mid-February matinee, in the equally removed city of Goole; and Act Three is similarly presented in April, at yet another matinee, in the far-off town of Stockton-on-Tees. In an unusual twist, we see "Nothing On" first in Act One on stage, as seen by the audience, and later during Acts Two and Three, from Back Stage. There, we realize that the actors are actually involved in real-life sexual entanglements that crudely mirror the foolish escapades taking place "out front!" Neil A. Casey as the play's idiotic, bedevilled and exhausted leading man; Kristen Sergeant as "Nothing On's" pretty, young, uncomplicated ingenue in her undies; Barlow Adamson, prone to nose bleeds at extremely unexpected times, as the show's other leading man; Sarah deLima, as a veteran actress, doing her best as the play's comically befuddled HouseMaid; MaryAnn Zschau as the always-reliable, ever-gossiping cast stalwart; and Bob Jolly as a bumbling supporting-player and drunkard, with a penchant for missing his cues and forgetting his lines. All of this revolves absurdly around a plot-driven saucer of Sardines, that appear, disappear and reappear, mostly at the wrong times. Jeremiah Kissel as the play's anxious, overbearing and amorously-inclined Director, and Jessica Healy and David Krinitt as the play-within-a-play's hardpressed Stage Manager and Handyman, also deserve special notice. High marks likewise for Robert M. Russo's clever and creative on-stage and behind-stage settings. The parallel contradictions, foul-ups, and missteps, performed simultaneously in-front and in-back, by the highly accomplished first rate ensemble, under Spiro Veloudas' well-coordinated direction, combine to provide an evening of nonstop hilarity! Now playing through June 5. (My Grade: 5)

THE LOVE OF THE NIGHTINGALE

Review by Norm Gross

At the Abbott Memorial Theater in Waltham, Mass., the Hovey Players present "The Love of the Nightingale " by Timberlake Wertenbaker. Based on the ancient Greek myth of Philomele and Procne, as recounted in Sophocles' "Tereus" and Ovid's "Metamorphoses." Originally staged in England in 1988 by the Royal Shakespeare Company, and Off-Broadway in 1993, it has since been performed regionally, most recently in Los Angeles in 2001. The story, set in Ancient Greece, centers on the plight of two Athenian sisters, Procne and her younger sibling Philomele. Procne reluctantly marries Tereus, the powerful King of Thrace, and joins him in his Kingdom as his wife. Unhappy in Thace, because of its unfamiliar people and strange customs, she persuades Tereus to return to Athens to bring her younger sister Philomele back to Thrace to help her in adjusting to life in her new and unusual surroundings. Unfortunately, after returning to Athens, Tereus begins to lust after Philomele, and after being roundly rejected by her, then takes her brutally, by force. Later, shocked and anguished by the King's savagery, she loudly and bitterly denounces him! Overwhelmingly angered by her rebuke, he silences her, by cutting out her tongue! Resigned for many years to being made mute, Fate then exacts its measure, for her and eternity, Philomele being transformed into a Nightingale, Procne into a Swallow, and Tereus into a Hoopoe! The author uses this legendary tale as the basis for her attitudes, not only on male violence and rape in particular, but also on the townsfolk's reaction to it. In a striking moment, an elderly aide to Philomele draws a somber comparison between the sexual assault and the invasion and destruction of her homeland by conquerors, cautioning her that the people met whatever challenge was required of them to survive. Sally Dennis gives a passionately intense portrayal as Philomele, with equally strong performances by Brian Polak as Tereus, Julia Van Daam as Procne, and Dorothy Ahle as the gravely, counseling, elderly aide, under Luke Dennis' well focused direction. The simple minimal set, cooperatively developed by the cast: a series of black, upright partitions, which easily adapt to suggest walls, entrances and Court rooms, effectively established the play's many different settings. Although some of the acting by the lesser supporting players was occasionally uneven and/or unconvincing, the strong performances of the main roles, together with the drama's overall compelling theme, still maintained the play's provocative purpose throughout. Now playing through May 29. (My Grade: 4)

WHAT TIME IS IT?

Review by Norm Gross

At the Theatre Cooperative in Somerville, Mass. is the world premiere of "What Time Is It? " by Vladimir Zelevinsky, a new play commissioned by this theatrical company. Set in 16th century Nuremberg, when and where, (according to the play's program notes) the first clock was invented. This latter "fact " is certainly disputable, with several earlier