

'Apple Tree' tackles American culture and thought

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The Dartmouth Staff

In 1966, "The Apple Tree" opened at the Shubert Theatre in New Haven, Conn. This musical consists of three one-act musicals. Act I is based on Mark Twain's "The Diary of Adam and Eve," Act II is based on Frank Stockton's "The Lady or the Tiger?" and Act III is based on Jules Feiffer's "Passionella."

Last weekend, "The Apple Tree" made its debut here at Dartmouth at the Moore Theatre. This production was not only entertaining, but it was professionally thought-provoking. Brilliantly directed by Bill Fennelly, "The Apple Tree" was also supported by the talented musical direction of Louis Burkot and interesting choreography of Ford Evans. It seems this production was destined for success.

Act I displayed the overwhelming talent of Andrew Dahl '05, who played Adam, and Kimberly Marable '05, who played Eve. This act challenged the socially-accepted preconceived notions of Adam and Eve. Issues of the differences between men and women were raised. Adam was annoyed by Eve's incessant talking; Eve was frustrated by Adam's standoffishness. Eve played into the female stereotype by crying to "get her way." Adam played into the male stereotype by asserting his physical "strength."

Not only did Adam and Eve provoke questions of gender roles and identity, they humanized the grandiose and sometimes staid story of creation. Being the first humans ever must have been quite lonely. This isolation was displayed by Eve's need to be friends with her reflection. It was also displayed by both Adam and Eve's need to name everything in their new world, an indication of their overwhelming attempt to orient themselves in a foreign environment.

If Act I was about forbidden fruit, then Act II was about forbidden knowledge. In this tale, Princess Barbara, played by Rachel Morris '05, was forced to choose a fate for her lover. Unfortunately, death or marriage to another beautiful woman were the options. Princess Barbara's choice raises

the question of which is worse: fate or what real love would drive someone to choose.

While raising thought-provoking questions about love and the power of choice, Act II was also an overt parody of the proud U.S. of A. The ruler of "A Semi-Barbaric Kingdom" had a suspicious resemblance to President George W. Bush. With cowboy hat and twangy accent in full-force, this leader led his people to a state of frenzied violence.

With red-white-and-blue clad cheerleaders cartwheeling across the stage, gun-carrying soldiers, and hair-teased beauty queens riding on a float, it was hard to miss the harsh indictment of America's own "semi-barbarity." This notion of American "barbarity" was a hard pill to swallow, especially since big question marks were raised but no answers were offered.

Act III was a further indictment of American society, but with a more humorous tint. From New York City to Tinsel town, the story followed the transformation of a typical "common American." One song, "Working By Day and Dreaming By Night," reflected the all too common pattern of Middle America to work by day and then live vicariously through TV at night. With the help of a Cinderella-inspired godmother, the main character, Ella's, dream to become a movie star was real-

ized. She was transformed from black, unknown chimney sweeper to white, beautiful celebrity.

With a red boa and a more than generous bust, Passionella swept her way to fame in Hollywood. Sarah Ries '04 gave an impeccable performance as ditsy glamour girl, but tinted this shallow state with just the right amount of sarcasm to raise the larger question: is this what we aspire to?


Even when Passionella reached the height of her success, she wanted more. At one point she laments: "Oh, how hollow is all this without the right man to share it with." For, how could life be complete or satisfying without a man?

The narrator, Caz Liske '04, did a phenomenal job of subtly portraying the sarcasm inherent in this storyline. Some of his lyrics hit a bit too close to home in this anorexic, airbrushed country: "How does it feel to be the world's ideal when you know and I know that you are not real?"

This indictment to the American Dream, the varying definition of beautiful and the challenging of America's barbarity all inspire thought, and, as we are all thoughtful people on this privileged, ivy-green campus, it would be beneficial to all to see this show. "The Apple Tree" is showing May 19, 20 and 21 at 8 p.m. and May 22 at 2 p.m.

HOP CENTER

THE APPLE TREE



Thursday-Saturday, MAY 13-15 • 8 pm
 Wednesday-Friday, MAY 19-21 • 8 pm
 Saturday, MAY 22 • 2 pm • The Moore Theater

"VASTLY ORIGINAL
 musical comedy"
 New York Post