

Art View

From Mimes To M*A*S*H

Joe Cronin

Talented actor Al Alda is a shining example of the fact that only a really good player can give a really bad performance. In the pivotal leading role of the soldier, Alda is noisy and inept. He tosses himself about the stage, ranting and raving, stumbling into furniture.

The above excerpt did not appear in *TV Guide* and does not refer to Alan Alda's performance as Hawkeye Pierce in the long-running M*A*S*H. It appeared in *The Ram* (February 26, 1952) and concerned Alda's performance on the Collins Auditorium stage in 1953 in Herman Wouk's *The Traitor*.

The idea of Alan Alda treading the boards of Rose Hill's aging theater, subjecting himself to the tender mercies of *Ram* critics, may seem humorous today. But as the Mimes and Mimmers prepare for the opening of *The Importance of Being Earnest* on November 29, audiences and performers alike can point with pride to distinguished Mimes alumni such as Alda and others and reflect on the prospect of future alumni making names for themselves in show business.

The Mimes and Mimmers, the University's oldest dramatic organization, is now well into its 123rd year of presenting college theatre. Throughout the years, other theatrical organizations, such as the old Fordham University Theater, independent student groups headed by campus personalities like Al Vitale, or the recent Campus Ministries Players, among others, have produced plays that range from the simple to the extravagant. Still, the Mimes present four plays a year and strive to maintain a tradition that was

established when they were first organized as the St. John's Dramatic Society in 1855.

Combing through old Mimes records and past issues of the various campus media, one is struck by the number of individuals who have indeed made it "big" in the entertainment world. Actor William Windom, of the television show *My World and Welcome To It*, played Romeo in a production of *Romeo and Juliet* co-sponsored by the Mimes and Fordham University Theater. *The Ram* described him as "uniformly competent," but *The Monthly*, which then also printed theatre reviews, said that "the plaintive tones of his more rueful scenes were often carried over to scenes where they had no place." One wonders exactly how these student critics would respond to their own words today.

One tradition the Mimes do keep is the presentation of one "classical" play per year, which has not generally drawn large audiences in the past few years. Still, they feel a responsibility to expose the campus to the true masterpieces of the drama. One such play will be performed later this month. It is Oscar Wilde's classic comedy *The Importance of Being Earnest*, which perhaps could be considered the epitome of Victorian wit. *Earnest* is directed by Terry Brockbank, who earlier directed *Five Finger Exercise* here, and its cast is a combination of veteran performers and new players drawn from the class of 1983.

That *Earnest* is considered a classic is interesting, in light of the fact that it was written forty years after the Mimes'

predecessors first began to produce plays here. The accent then was always on Shakespeare, with virtually every one of his important works being produced here at one time or another. However, the ancient Greek drama was also represented in a famous 1941 production of *Oedipus Tyrannus* by the Fordham University Theater. *The Ram* review of May 9, 1941 stated, "the chorus has combined the interpretive dancing with the singing of the choral odes. The fifteen who accomplish this [include] freshman James C. Finlay." *Sic tran-sit gloria mundi*.

Another famous personality active in Fordham drama during the 1950's was Jack Haley, Jr., son of the *Wizard of Oz* tin man and an important movie director and producer in his own right. He went on to marry movie star Liza Minelli, but his Fordham roles were strictly minor. One Mime who never performed on stage, but served as Business Manager in 1952, made a name for himself in a field other than entertainment. It was G. Gordon Liddy, whose name and signature hauntingly appears on several documents in the files of the Mimes and Mimmers.

Thus don't be surprised if, sometime in the future, a name in a Broadway program or in *TV Guide* strikes a familiar chord. However, in the light of experience, take any critique, good or bad, with a large grain of salt.

Joe Cronin, FC '80, is business manager of the Mimes and Mimmers. He has never been panned in The Ram nor been caught for tapping phones.