

# The Real Inspector Hound

Jean Garnett, Feb 8 2010

A blizzard visited St. Andrew's on Friday evening, and thick snowflakes continued to fall until Saturday afternoon. With the snow knee-high, it was a perfect day for sledding, snowball fights, and building snow forts on the front lawn. In the evening, St. Andreans ventured out into the winter wonderland to see the first of the winter plays, *The Real Inspector Hound*, directed by Emily Pressman and performed in Engelhard Hall. The one-act play, written by Tom Stoppard, is set in a theater, where two critics, Moon and Birdboot (played by Charlie Martin '11 and Daniel Hasse '10, two actors who have a gift for comic delivery), watch a play, a stereotypical murder mystery in the style of Agatha Christie. The play within a play is set at a country estate, and none of the house's inhabitants seem to notice the dead body lying inconspicuously on the stage. The maid, played by Serena Woodward '12, switches on the radio just in time to catch a police message warning that a mad man is on the loose in the area. The two critics, composing their reviews out loud between scenes, try to figure out whodunit, as well as what "it" is.

In the play within a play, Simon Gascoyne (played by Jay Patenade '12) is a mysterious newcomer to the estate who has a way with the ladies. Having spurned young Felicity Cunningham (Casey Schuller '12), he pursues her friend, Cynthia Muldoon (Frances Fuqua '12), a beautiful widow whose expressions of grief over the disappearance of her husband seem suspiciously hollow. Casey was perfect as the seemingly sweet Felicity, who unleashes her jealous wrath when she finds out about Simon and Cynthia, and Frances got big laughs with her melodramatic damsel-in-distress act. As Simon stands declaring his passion for Cynthia, a man in a wheelchair speeds out from stage-left and mows him down. This is Major Magnus Muldoon (an uproarious performance by Cameron McDonald '11), the bellowing and curmudgeonly brother in law of Cynthia, who is also in love with her. Alannah Chen '11 soon stumbles onto the scene as Inspector Hound, a rather inept investigator in search of the madman.

The men in the play are not the only ones who pine for the beautiful Cynthia; the critic Birdboot is driven to distraction by his love for the actress playing her, and his admiration creeps into his appraisal of the play. Moon is also distracted; he is reviewing the play as a stand-in for another critic, Higgs, and he keeps harping on his professional jealousy and his humiliation at being merely a "substitute." Reality and fiction become catastrophically confused when Moon answers a phone ringing onstage during intermission and finds Birdboot's nagging wife, Myrtle, on the line. Stunned, he passes the phone to his fellow critic, and when the play starts up again Birdboot gets caught in the drama, mistaken for Simon, and meets his death on stage. Moon breaks the fourth wall to get to the bottom of Birdboot's death, taking on the role of Inspector Hound, and he discovers that the dead body on stage is none other than Higgs, the critic for whom he had been standing in. Magnus Muldoon accuses Moon of being the murderous madman and guns him down, and as the unfortunate critic lies dying a hilariously protracted death, Magnus leaps from his wheelchair and reveals himself as "the real Inspector Hound."

As usual, Stoppard challenges the audience with his blurring of art and reality, but he also finds time in this one-act for plenty of pure slapstick comedy, and the cast pulled off this balance brilliantly.

