



Warren Mitchell's Willy Loman in *Death Of A Salesman*.

THEATRE

A veritable feast

A VERITABLE theatrefest is currently occurring in Sydney with everything from solid box office blockbusters to an interesting Sydney University Dramatic Society (SUDS) production.

At the York Theatre, Seymour Centre, is the Nimrod production of Arthur Miller's Pulitzer prize-winner, *Death Of A Salesman*. This play has been going strong since 1949 and is guaranteed to go on packing them in for some time yet.

Warren Mitchell has picked up three major awards so far for his performance as super-maniac salesman, Willy Loman, the sadly deluded, frightened little man. In this production he is bullying, blustering, insecure, so highly emotional he leaves himself scarce on superlatives, and an ugly reminder of the guilt and guerrilla tactics of the normal-as-apple-pie family structures.

Biff (Mel Gibson) is too loveable, too bewildered, too puppy-like and too romantic but great value as a beautifully sensitive family football whose greatest crime is he's the apple of his father's eye and therefore can never live up to it.

Happy (Wayne Jarratt) plays the highly impressionable, doltish, perfect coward who takes refuge in the safety of assumed stupidity and its bi-product, success.

The mother, Linda Loman, played by Judi Farr, has great strength as a down-at-heel saint of domestic diplomacy and hypocrisy. It's not just her obsession with clean handkerchiefs, saccharine pills, combs and spectacles but her strict observation of family rites, like saying goodnight to Willy when he doesn't deserve the time of day.

This classic, which cracks open the family closet and exposes it in all its nuclear madness, provokes anger, sympathy and tears in audiences.

The SUDS production, *Magnificence*, by Howard Brenton, is at the Downstairs Theatre, Seymour Centre, until July 24. First staged at the Royal Court Theatre, London, in 1973, this is directed by Lindsay Daines and contrasts sharply with the fever pitch performances and histrionics afflicting stages elsewhere.

Daines' dignified young cast approaches this "act of theatrical vandalism and terrorism" with a cold objectivity which intensifies Brenton's implicit violence and contempt for England's privileged upper class.

Heath and MacMillan figures of the past are recognisable in the form of Alice. (Stephen Hughes) and Babs (Robert Wick-

ham) and can be interpreted from a contemporary viewpoint. They are portrayed as ineffectual, diseased and decadent farts maintained by a system of sinister civility.

This play is mandatory for theatre-lovers who are concerned with lead-footed and brained laws and usually feel like strangers in their own land and language.

Party Wall by Ken Horler deals with a different kind of law. Currently at the Upstairs Theatre, Nimrod, it fails to go for the jugular and rip into a repugnant political issue which has been kept down for too long.

It blows it when it comes to the perfect target for buffoonery and satire, *Menzies*, who is camped up by Robert Davis.

This production, directed by George Whaley, carries too many court scenes and is far too frothy. Unfortunately Sharon Raschke's brilliant musical back-up barely saves it even with Horler's witty lyrics and Raschke's cabaret style compositions like the electioneering air, *Bob's Your Uncle*.

When They Send Me Three And Four-pence, Steve J. Spears' new play at The Stables until August 7, directed by Fay Mokotow, deals with social rejects stranded between the fox trot and the twist in a St Kilda church dance hall.

Gradually the pupils become more involved in the drinking and "bennie" (benzedrine) bouts of their derro dancing teacher, Bob, played by a light-footed Ross Sharp, who attacks the part with real relish.

Marion Bonkowsky, a sturdy colleague in staunch tartan skirt played by Janet Foye, spends most of the first act sitting on the sidelines but comes through with a vengeance in the second.

Betty (Laura Gabriel), "the bouncing ballerina" is a bitter-sweet, sinister nymph, but her role is under-developed.

This play shows Spears' latest collection of fine and quirky new characters, most of them on the down-hill slide. There's plenty of good gutsy language and some shades of Benjamin Franklin.

— BERWYN LEWIS