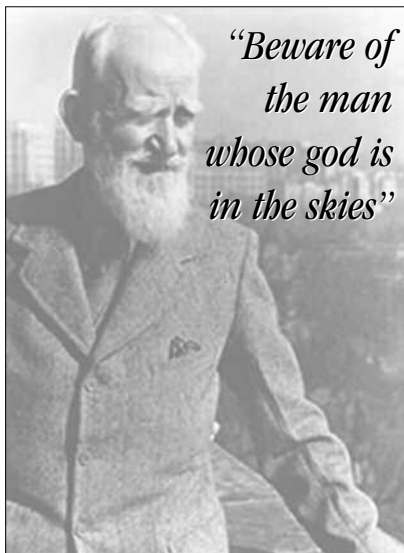


Propaganda

Act 2 Scene 6
November 2006

“WHAT A MAN! IS HE A MAN!”

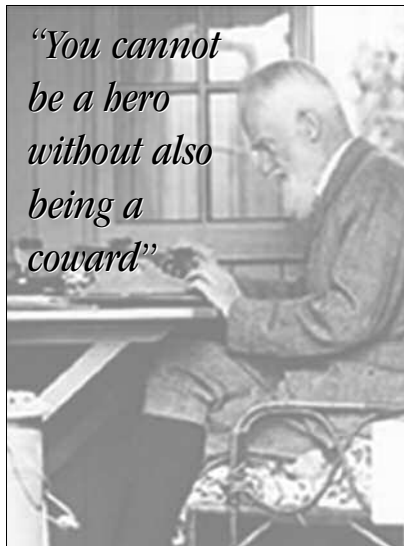
You'll hear this line at the very end of our forthcoming show. It's in reference to the play's hero, but might just as well have been said about our playwright. Indeed, the playwright might have said it about himself, and very likely did as he splashed his face with cold water each and every morning. He was not a shy and retiring type, and he admitted he often quoted himself because it added spice to his conversation. He was a prodigious fountain of energy throughout his very long life, and I think he failed in one of his stated goals which was to "be all used up" when he died. He was the Energizer Bunny with a significantly higher verbal IQ. Music and theatre critic, playwright, essayist, socialist, vegetarian, champion of Ibsen, Mozart and Shakespeare (this side idolatry), bicyclist, embodiment of the life force, comedian, superman and superstar, the one, the only (trumpet fanfare, please), George Bernard Shaw!



We're happy to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the great man's birth with our production of *Arms and the Man*. It's not one of Shaw's most mature plays, nor is it among his weightiest. It is early, and it is perfect. To my mind it's all the better for not being burdened with the preachy garrulity that overcame him as he grew in fame and office. And it has all of Shaw's best qualities, the ones that make Shaw Shaw, or rather "GBS".

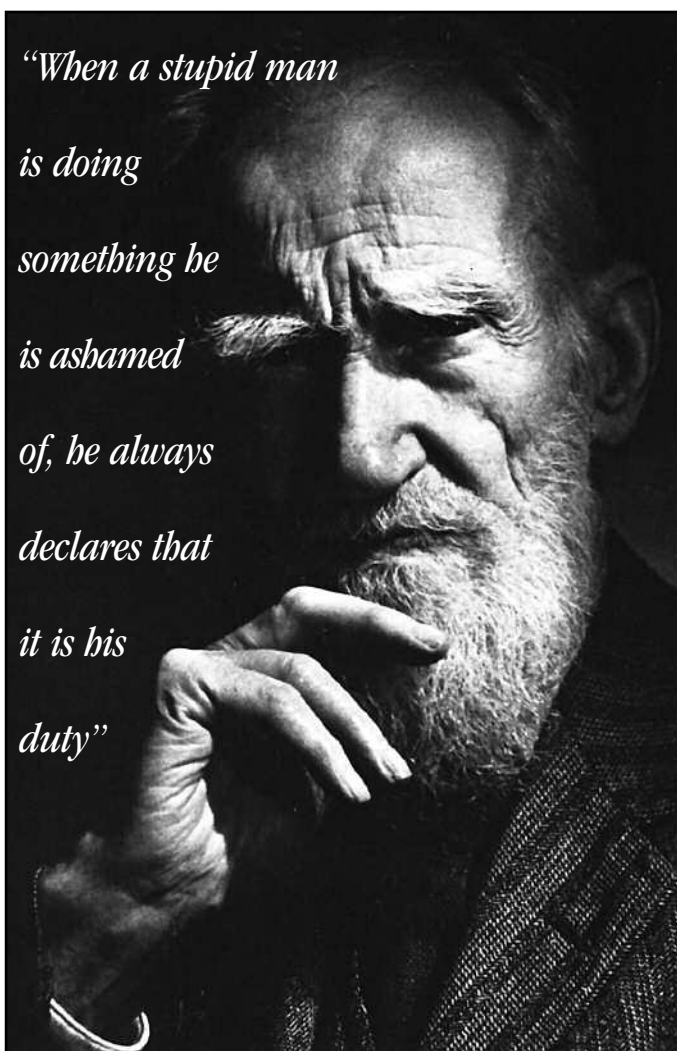
To begin with, as always, there's that wonderful language. Not so much that will sink a ship (the play lasts under two hours), but just enough to keep those bubbles in the champagne. Everyone in a Shaw play has a strong point of view and the ability to express it with vigor and flair. Everyone can fill a sail with a declaration, and you sooner or later can count on the wind being taken out of that sail, and to the delight of us all. Everyone has a splendid aria, everyone can volley at the net. It's some of the most spirited wit play we have, the kind of talk we can all understand and the kind of talk that makes us feel smarter for effortlessly doing so.

But Shaw wasn't just a word man. Much more than that, he was a playwright, a master of plot and character. Every Shaw role is a good role. Even the Bulgarian offi-



cer who makes a brief entrance in the first act has something challenging to do as he takes the stage for his 47 second appearance. Characters are strong in themselves, and even stronger when set against other characters. Shaw liked to think of himself as a reformer of the stage, and he certainly was, but his dramaturgy is wonderfully old fashioned. He was the master of the Victorian well made play. He drew his stage action out on a chess board, plotting every move with precision. Each detail of dress, conversation or stage furniture was keenly imagined and contributing to the whole. A Shaw play, well drilled and running, purrs along like an old Rolls Royce. It is deeply satisfying. And the loudest sound is the Shavian clock ticking, keeping perfect time.

A Shaw play may be a perfectly well oiled machine, but it's also a very musical one. Shaw's mother was a wonderful singer, and his family members were all musical. He was a music critic and a piano player before he was a playwright (he's beginning to sound a lot like Mark Arnest, our own theatre critic, and this is not just a shameless plug for a good review but rather an invitation for Mark to grow his beard longer and dye it red). Shaw always said Mozart was a deeper influence than any writer, and he created his characters not just as speaking parts but singing parts, imagining them as sopranos, tenors, altos and baritones. Shaw imagined his scenes succeeding each other like themes and variations in a musical composition, and this is exactly how they work. The great actress Sybil Thorndike remembered Shaw's reading of his *Saint Joan* as the greatest experience of her life. He knew intuitively how each note should be played, with each character a different instrument in his orchestra. You don't simply direct a Shaw play; you conduct it. You don't simply act his parts, you play his notes. And there's always the



danger you will go flat or sharp. As Shaw famously said, "Hell is full of amateur pianists."

While *Arms and the Man* is a soufflé, it's still a Shavian soufflé and that means the chef is preparing something more substantial than the usual fluff. Shaw knew he was a born comic writer, but he said, "any fool can make an audience laugh. I want to see how many of them, laughing or grave, are in the melting mood. And this result cannot be achieved . . . without an intellectual effort which my plays probably do not seem serious enough to call forth." Shaw called this play "an anti-romantic comedy" and you'll soon see why. Its hero is a prosaic Swiss mercenary, son of a hotel keeper, who keeps something to eat in his holster instead of ammunition. And this is the character who gets the girl, not the handsome cavalry officer who has just won the great battle at Slivnitza (don't



Post Office Box 7150
Colorado Springs, CO 80933-7150

Return Service Requested

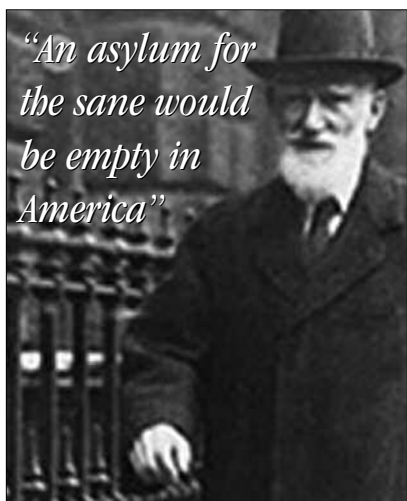
NON PROFIT
ORGANIZATION
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
COLORADO SPRINGS
COLORADO
PERMIT #657



If you receive more than one copy of this newsletter, please pass one along to a friend!

Arms and the Man (continued)

worry about him, he gets a girl too). In his preface to the play, Shaw named his satiric target clearly. It was idealism and the romance—which Shaw thought were one in the same. “Idealism,” he said, “which is only a flattering name for romance in politics and morals, is as obnoxious to me as romance in ethics in ethics and religion... I can no longer be satisfied with fictitious morals and fictitious good conduct, shedding fictitious glory on robbery, starvation, disease, crime, drink, war, cupidity and all other commonplaces of civilization . . .” For Shaw, actions and beliefs invoking romance and ideals usually meant, in practice, something like self delusion and hypocrisy leading to disaster. Given our own high minded national adventures of late you can see why Shaw still speaks to us.



this exchange from another of his plays (*You Never Can Tell*):

FINCH McCOMAS.
We're old-fashioned: the world thinks it has left us behind. There is only one place in England where your opinions would still pass as advanced.

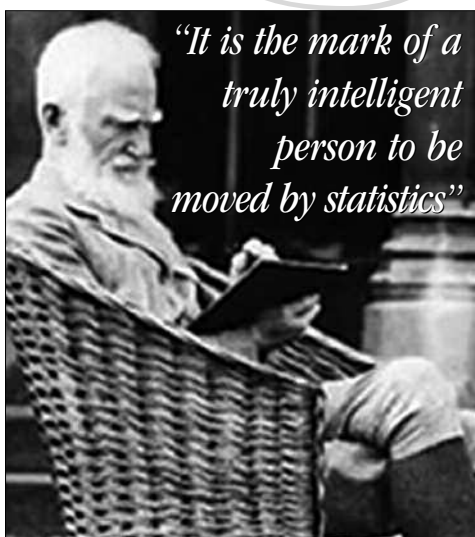
MRS. CLANDON:
(scornfully unconvinced) The Church, perhaps?

FINCH McCOMAS:
No: the theatre.

And on that note, quoting our most quotable author yet again, “I withdraw and ring up the curtain.”

— Murray Ross

But neither Shaw nor I wish to belabor this point. Speaking as a secular preacher, Shaw said, “my way of joking is to tell the truth. It is the funniest joke in the world.” But speaking as a comic writer he put the emphasis otherwise: “Take the utmost trouble to find the right thing to say, and then say it with the utmost levity.” He certainly followed his own excellent advice in *Arms and the Man*. The play is a comic miracle which makes a still pertinent point. It actually makes many points since Shaw like every other gifted dramatist could not help seeing the different sides of any issue, phenomenon or character. His prosaic hero turns out to be “an incurable romantic” and his dashing cavalry officer learns to his own profit that playing the romantic lead can be “a very fatiguing business.” Shaw’s Bulgarian setting of 1885 turns out to be a preposterous neverland where European civilization meets Balkan passion, and Swiss practicality finds true happiness with a fetching operatic heroine. The play is a joy from start to finish, a most wonderful confection, pure pleasure, a chocolate cream you can gobble right down. The messages are there, but Shaw knew all too well the limits of his chosen medium. Consider



Arms and the Man plays
November 30-December 17
Show Times: Wednesdays -
Saturdays at 7:30 p.m.,
Saturday Matinees at 2:00 p.m.,
Sundays at 4:00 p.m.
For tickets and information, log on to
www.uccstheatreworks.com or
call the THEATREWORKS Box Office at
719.262.3232

Sunday Speaker Series: Arms and the Man

Both talks begin at 3:00 p.m. at the Bon Vivant Theatre and last for roughly a half hour, ending well before the 4:00 p.m. performances. Admission is free.

8 December - 3:00 p.m. Three Cheers for Shaw!
Theatreworks Artistic Director Murray Ross gives a guided tour of the life and work of our legendary playwright.

17 December 3:00 p.m. All About Chocolate.
Mike and Fi Niswonger of Patsy's Candies tell us about the making of delicious gourmet chocolate creams—with samples to follow!

Holiday Gift Certificates Available

Don't know what to get for that hard-to-shop-for friend or relative? Give a “special night out” full of laughter, romance and drama for the holiday season. Gift Certificates to the THEATREWORKS are the perfect choice for last-minute holiday gift-giving or as stocking stuffers.

Gift Certificates are available in any amount and may be used towards the purchase of tickets to any performance at THEATREWORKS, subject to availability. Gift Certificates can be mailed either to the purchaser or the designated recipient and can also be held at the box office for pick-up.

Suggested Amounts: \$22 for a single Ticket
\$54 for a 3 Show Subscription for *Top Dog/Underdog*, *The Syringa Tree*, and *The Importance of Being Earnest* (\$18 per ticket, includes VIP Access)

For more information, call the box office at 719.262.3232

Order Tickets Online and Save
www.uccstheatreworks.com
or call 262-3232