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Vincent Price expresses his feelings on portraying Oscar Wilde.

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By Jeffrey Charney
Assistant Entertainment Editor

"The first and only duty in life is to enjoy it," once remarked British playwright Oscar Wilde. Nowhere was Wilde's comment more evident than in Divisions and Delights, starring Vincent Price, Friday at the Township Auditorium.

IT IS RARE for such a legendary stage and screen performer to be brought to Columbia and Vincent Price's performance as Oscar Wilde was nothing short of spectacular. The audience was entertained and amazed as they witnessed 90 minutes of polished "acting" in the true sense of the word.

Divisions and Delights, written by John Gay, basically concerned the diverse, yet humorously witt nature of British playwright, Oscar Wilde.

In addition to his success as a playwright, Wilde was the most celebrated conversationalist of his generation in the late 19th century. His most famous plays are The Picture of Dorian Gray, An Ideal Husband and The Importance of Being Earnest.

With such brilliant success also came disastrous controversy; Wilde was accused of homosexuality. Although he denied this, he was ordered to be imprisoned for two years.

IT WAS APPARENT that Vincent Price could meet the challenge of portraying such a complex character as Wilde from the moment that he appeared on stage. His presence added an unexplainable aura which elevated the set from its drab simplicity, consisting of only a chair, table and a lectern. Throughout the performance Price utilized each of these props to their fullest, without confusing his movements to only one part of the stage.

It was evident from the play's forceful beginning that no topic would be barred, as Price stated, "If I offend anyone, I apologize, it's the law of the jungle -- I offend everyone." This statement was certainly not an exaggeration, for during the course of the performance, Price attacked everything from Southerners, to the Church and finally a vicious attack on the press. However, absolutely no one was offended, which is a credit to a clever script by John Gay and a subtle, yet sarcastic delivery by Price.

During the first half of the performance, Price allowed the audience to become familiar with the humor, yet brilliant personality of Wilde. His eccentric and cynical nature was thoroughly brought to the forefront, with his intense feelings toward his past prison sentences concealed inside. For this reason the audience did not lose touch with the play during the intermission and realized that there must be something more.

The second half of the performance was deeper, delving into the seriousness of Wilde's ailments and more importantly stressing the confusion involved in his love for another man. Wilde's cynical success expressed in the first half of the play had been transformed into a wretched and resentful bitterness toward life, as his career was coming to an end.

Through these dynamically emotional recollections of prison, Price conveyed Wilde's feelings of punishment, depravity, and isolation that he lived under all of his writing and ultimately the end of his life.

However, the performance returned to end on a somber and negative tone, but closed at Price laughingly signed, "Give me that old time life and I will dispense with the necessities."

The Crowd sat in silence until the incomparable Price returned to the stage where he was immediately greeted with and enthusiastic standing ovation.

Divisions and Delights appeared as if John Gay had written the play especially for Price. At first this seemed surprising, for Price was most noted for his appearances in over 100 horror films.

In a brief conversation with Price, I discovered that he is enjoying his stage career, just as much or possibly more than his career on screen. "I think Divisions and Delights is the best thing I have ever done in my life. It's wonderfully funny, witty, moving, touching, and a joy to play," Price confidently stated.

Price is a man who is able to reflect on his years in horror films with no qualms and regrets, but basically sees a difference between his style of horror film and those of the present. "Today sex and violence detracts from the really entertaining quality of the genuinely thrilling horror and are only done to get people into the theatre." He continued to explain that his favorite film was Laura.

He feels that his primary involvement with horror films does not have much bearing on the way people react to him on stage. He adds, "I have done many Hollywood Square and various television shows, which really don't relate in one way."

As he looks toward the future, Price will continue to tour with Divisions and Delights for another year, performing in Australia, New Zealand and hopefully going to Japan. After this he will make a film in England.

Doc and Merle Watson perform footstomping bluegrass, blues

By Tom Travis

Doc and Merle Watson brought their talented pickin' to the Quarter Moon last Thursday night and electrified a foot stomping audience with a smooth combination of bluegrass and blues.

From the opening number of "Black Mountain Rag," until the traditional Watson rendition of Jimmy Driftwood's "Tennessee Stud," the Watsons indulged themselves as masters of the Blue Ridge Mountains.

Watson's versatility was highlighted with an easy transition from the boisterous "Shape of My Heart" to a rocking version of "Deep River Blues," one of the best songs of the set.

Merle's lead guitar and banjo were fine compliments to Doc's tight flat-top picking. Doc Watson has often been referred to as the finest flat-top picker in the country, and he reaffirmed this claim during the number "Wendy and Warren," in which he and Merle "traded licks" and got the crowd moving.

The excellent sound system at the Quarter Moon, which could expose the slightest musical mistake, seemed to spurn the Watsons to an extreme level of musical precision.

Bob Dylan's "Don't Think Twice" was one of the most moving, and most moving songs of the night, and Watson's voice seemed deeper and more mystical than ever.

Watson, who has been touring for more than 18 years, likes to play smaller clubs and "shows no signs of slowing up," according to his son Merle. "We don't play for just the money," he said. "Money don't always get us places."

According to Merle, the entire Watson family, from Doc, Merle, and Roger to his brother Warren, "We don't really play bluegrass. We play more of a wide spectrum of music," he said.

Merle's talents include lead and slide guitar and banjo, and he admits to being influenced mainly by black blues singers along with a heavy preference to Allman Brothers tunes.

Doc, who has been blind since birth, compliments his exceptional guitar picking with harmonica and "smooth, almost unearthly vocals."

Watson led in to his legendary version of "Tennessee Stud" near the end of his set, and the crowd was screaming. This mountain ballad to Watson's trademark, and the tight picking combined with the heartfelt lyrics had the audience hanging on every word.

But it was Watson's musical talent, opened both shows for Watson with solo performances. Crosby provided fine opening shows, which included his "Tante Price Rudolph," which set the mood for a great night of high quality music. The sincere vocals of Doc Watson at the Quarter Moon.