



Nothing to add to prostitution story

Hookers on Davie
a film by Janis Cole and Holly Dale
at the Carleton Cineplex
opens tomorrow

By IAN CLARKE

"Nobody can offend you by telling you a dirty toilet story. They can offend you because it's trite; you have heard it many, many times."
—Lenny Bruce

Up on the silver screen familiarity induces boredom, repetition breeds contempt. *Hookers on Davie* has nothing new to reveal about prostitution. It is tainted with a plodding form of narrative that wavers effortlessly between simplistic didacticism and hypocritical sensationalism. Bernard Shaw wasn't fooling when he wrote, "The road to Hell is paved with good intentions." This feature-length documentary certainly has good intentions and may take a bow for purporting a social conscience, but such ingredients do not a good film necessarily make.

Action documentaries tend to position the audience as "voyeurs," comfortably sitting behind the camera, enjoying the immediacy of "real" drama yet vicariously immune in the inherent danger—what we seem to be watching is *bona fide* reality. But the filmmaker invisibly crafts his or her medium to deliver a message. Leni Riefenstahl honed her 1933 masterpiece *Triumph of the Will* to the extent that Hitler and his boys seem like a bunch of fairly good guys.

Hookers on Davie attempts to tread the line of neutrality and herein lies its demise. One must judge the merits of the message from the meandering confessions of the hookers themselves. And what they espouse are all-too-common tales of sordid childhoods, drug involvement and the omnipresent quest for cash. A magazine like *True Detective* will provide such novel and illuminating insights. Any "entertainment value" is derived from the style of *Real People*—watching human beings

publicly display their emotional and physical eccentricities in the genre of a freak show.

The bulk of *Hookers on Davie* focuses on Michelle (formerly Mark), a 24-year-old transvestite who has hustled in the Davie Street of Vancouver since the age of 13. She/he mimes with a strange round table of others involved in the skin trade. Sporadically scattered among the scenes of hustling are isolated interviews which offer up the history of each misbegotten member.

Michelle's mother makes an appearance, stating that naturally she is upset over her son's lifestyle, but realizes that the damage is irrevocable. A hooker named Bev professes a brand of feminism, so twisted in its logic, that it would instantly congeal the blood of even the most liberated woman. Transvestites, transsexuals and your standard lamp post hookers all get a moment to deliver candid testaments of their headlong plunge from grace.

Filmmakers Janis Cole and Holly Dale, Sheridan College grads, are best-known for their prison documentary *P4W: Women Behind Bars*. Their work largely focuses "on the lives of people who exist outside of that which is considered normal society." A righteous premise to be sure, but simply aiming a camera at a group of acerbic prostitutes and fleshing out a background with a montage of David Frost-style interviews leaves one with the parts but no whole. The film is too long at 86 minutes and begs for an editor with a deft sense of narrative and sharp scissors.

The most notable revelation in the film is just how many prostitutes there are in the Davie St. area of Vancouver. The place looks like a Little Amsterdam with enough red-light action to make Yonge Street look like an innocent digression in a Puritan picnic. Why the local police allow this to continue is a dark mystery which the film never decides to explore.

Hookers on Davie is a dirty toilet story, garish, flat and offensive because one has heard it many, many, (too) many times.

So nu? New writers in Festival

New Play Festival
Atkinson Theatre, starting today
Free Admission

By HELEN HINKLE

The works in York's New Play Festival this year will not necessarily be "polished productions," according to organizing Professor Tony Stephenson. "It's a chance to let the playwrights see what works and what doesn't work in front of an audience," he says.

The 11 works range from brief monologues to one-acts, and will be presented over three consecutive evenings, beginning tonight. The plays have been written by theatre students on all levels, including two in the graduate program. Four pieces have been selected from Stephenson's own playwrighting workshop, although he read and approved every play in the Festival.

Because of manpower limitations and time restrictions, not all the plays will be given a full staging. Instead, they will be

given a staged reading, which simply means the actors will carry their scripts while going through their movements. The decision as to which would be read and which staged rested largely, Stephenson says, "on the potential each had to benefit from a full production."

As usual, professionals from the Toronto theatre scene have been invited to attend. If any of them make the long trek northward—a feat few in the past have managed—here is what they'll see:

THURSDAY: *Prospectus* by Mary Spyraakis, *Esmé* by Jackie Samuda, *Trust* by Mary-Lou Zeitoun (by special arrangement with Lee), *I'm Having Your Baby* by Fern Sussman.

FRIDAY: *Dr. Mason's Cure* by Ellen Anerulat, *Back Alley Boys* by Colleen Subasic, *Sheila Livingstone, I Presume* by Pamela Mursten.

SATURDAY: *Gerbils* by David Widdicombe, *The Sculpture* by David Cameron, *Love and Affection* by Dolly Reisman, *Confidence is High* by Brad Wright.

Teacher writes Strange Manuscript

Tutorial leader brings Canadian fantasy classic to ROM stage

By JASON SHERMAN

York teacher Alberto Manguel is one of the creative forces behind Autumn Angel Repertory's latest foray into environmental theatre, a musical entry to be staged at the Royal Ontario Museum entitled *A Strange Manuscript*. Manguel, who teaches a Vanier College tutorial in fantastic literature, is a playwright-in-residence with Autumn Angel. When co-artistic director Thom Sokolowski told Manguel that he wanted to stage a fantasy, Manguel suggested adapting Canadian James de Mille's 1888 novel *Strange Manuscripts Found in a Copper Cylinder*.

Manguel, who has received excellent notices for his own books, including the fantasy anthology *Black Water*, calls the novel a visualization, rather than a philosophical presentation, of a Utopian society. And because Sokolowski is very much a visual director, the go-ahead was given.

There were problems, Manguel says, particularly with the adapting. *Strange Manuscripts* (the novel) concerns four people who discover a manuscript, the story of Adam Moore, who journeyed to a land called Kosekin where everything is inverted: love is affirmed by a mutual parting; death is coveted. The novel alternates between the actual manuscript and each character's thoughts on what they have

just read. Such an approach, says Manguel, would have made for a rather boring play.

So Autumn Angel worked collectively and came to a number of decisions. Manguel was impressed by how concerned the group, which works together on every Autumn Angel production, was "with laws of fantasy." In fact, one of the group's decisions was to make the play pure fantasy, with no attempt at realism. To this end, choreographer Jennifer Mascall created, on very short order, an entirely new set of gestures for the people of Kosekin, a process akin to that used by the makers of the film *Quest For Fire*, for which novelist Anthony Burgess "invented" a language.

Another decision that was made, Manguel explains, was to limit the dialogue and concentrate on the dance and on Allen Booth's music. "The dialogue would have been corny," Manguel says. And so, as the actors improvised their lines, he found himself jotting down what was said and later revising where necessary. "The play is not 'mine,'" he says, defining his role, somewhat modestly, as mere suggestor of the novel. (Manguel is, however, reworking his *The Kipling Play*, which was workshopped by Autumn Angel last year.)

Also added to the original story are a female companion who accepts the ways of Kosekin, and a political conflict amongst the inhabitants.

"We just want it to be a good time," Manguel says of the production. "We wanted to make a good adventure." With a set that revamps the ROM Theatre and with costumes by Bruce Appleby and Gurteen, *A Strange Manuscript* plays from April 10 to May 6, with tickets \$8.50 to \$10.50. For more information, call 365-0533.

"Please remember Victor Jara"—but not the way TWP play does

Victor Jara, Alive
directed by Ken Gass
at Toronto Workshop Productions
closes April 22

By KEVIN CONNOLLY

Victor Jara was a popular Chilean folk singer/actor who was arrested, tortured and murdered by Chilean soldiers in the Santiago stadium during that country's American-backed military coup in 1973. He had been an extremely vocal critic of the fascist regime that was entrenched in Chile during the 1960s, helping spread the social awareness that led to the election of Salvador Allende, the first freely elected Western Marxist leader, in 1973. His life and music are the subject of *Victor Jara, Alive* the new production at Toronto Workshop Productions.

It doesn't take too much to realize that the subject matter explored here is, potentially, extremely dramatic. Unfortunately, TWP's approach, while providing a pleasant evening's entertainment, leaves most of this potential untapped. The songs themselves are often marvelous, with their own inherent dramatic power, but they are given a sketchy dramatic context that amounts to little more than straight narration and the occasional monologue.

Male lead Frank Moore, though he has a great voice, delivered his lines so casually that he made his character impossible to believe. It seems as if we are watching a Mississauga theatre student rather than a Chilean revolutionary. We never get the sense that we are looking at Victor Jara, except during a few of the songs. Thus, what was ostensibly designed as a musical drama, becomes more like a

retrospective concert, loosely organized around a flat historical narrative.

Unlike *Names* and *The Wobbly*, two of TWP's more successful productions, this play is poorly choreographed, the



players often placed in visually awkward positions on stage. Director Ken Gass decided to use a concert format, preferring to create an atmosphere that reflected Jara's original recitals. But while it works well with the song sequences, this format

seems inadequate for the too-short dramatic moments. In several scenes, the audience is not even given enough time to adjust from song to drama before the new song takes over again.

The cast includes Jan Rubes, whose stirring baritone provides many of the play's better moments. Rubes is best known for his work with the Canadian Opera Company. Combined with Cheryl Cashman, who plays Jara's wife, and Nancy White, who plays several roles, including revolutionary songwriter Violet Para, Rubes and Moore provide some beautiful musical moments, the cast working together in four part harmony.

Though the audience seemed to enjoy it, the first act was a little drawn out, perhaps because it peaked too early, with a powerful Jara song about the fates of captured peasants under the fascist regime. The second act was much better, with longer dramatic sequences, the best of which excluded Moore. Rubes' presentation of the last speech of Salvador Allende was excellent, as were some of the Cashman monologues, but the whole thing collapsed—again with Moore's emotionless reappearance, and the poorly handled death scene.

The production wastes all the initial shock of the execution (which made the audience jump in their seats) by drawing out the scene to absurd lengths. Jara seems to take about a hundred bullets to die, and goes out singing in defiance, and the end result is silly rather than alarming.

Overall, the play is enjoyable only for its musical highlights. It is a shame that they weren't used in an effective dramatic framework, working towards a larger goal rather than remaining ends in themselves.