

## Siberry plays before enthusiastic crowd

By SIOBHAN McRAE

Jane Siberry, L'Etranger and The Realists proved to be almost too much of a good thing last Friday night as they played to a large and enthusiastic crowd at the Dal SUB.

With Siberry in the McInnes Room and L'Etranger in the Garden Cafeteria it was difficult to decide which group to watch. Siberry drew the larger crowd but L'Etranger kept an energetic, mainly younger audience dancing until they dropped from exhaustion.

The Realists warmed up for both bands, starting in the cafeteria and then running upstairs with their equipment, taking with them a fair number of fans. They played with considerable spirit and a definite sense of fun, nicely setting the tone for the evening.

Siberry came on stage with her band around 11 p.m. and was given a strong ovation by an audience whose excitement had built over the long wait.

The first set covered most of Siberry's latest album *No Borders Here*. Generally the live versions of her songs worked very well. Especially notable were *Mimi on the Beach*, *You Don't Need, Follow Me* and *Symmetry*. Siberry's spoken monologues were usually effective although I found that the one in *Extra Executives* tended to slow down the momentum of the song.

After a short break Siberry was back with an excellent second set which featured strong new material that bodes well for her next album. The concert ended on a high note, with Siberry called back for an encore by the enthusiastic throng before the stage.

Siberry's band was made up of John Switzer on bass, Al Cross on drums, Ken Myhr on guitar and Anne Bourne on keyboards. Their live performance featured extended versions of the previously recorded songs, giving individual members a chance to solo.

In this aspect the band's sound was more reminiscent of 70's style "progressive" techno rock than 80's style "new music". While this approach is understandable with such talented musicians I found it had a tendency to slightly overwhelm the actual songs which are strongly written and don't need quite as much embellishment.

Siberry herself has an appealingly vulnerable stage presence that works well with her personal-sounding songs but she seemed to be almost dwarfed by the extensive stage set. Nevertheless her voice came across loud and clear—a voice that really owes little to Joni Mitchell or Laurie Anderson or any other female vocalist that critics want to compare her to. It is a voice that is both unusual and unique and it plays an important role in her songs.

Meanwhile downstairs in the cafeteria, L'Etranger put on a powerful show, working hard to put across a message that may have been simpler than Siberry's both musically and lyrically but which was also extremely effective.

Much has been written of this Toronto band's social/political stance and their viewpoint comes through clearly in their songs. What strikes the listener most is the obvious commitment of every band member.

Seemingly tireless, L'Etranger presented two solid sets of music, a great deal of which was material that did not appear on either of their two E.P.'s, *Innocent Hands* and *Running Out of Funtown*. They also did some interesting cover versions of such songs as Buffalo Springfield's *For What It's Worth*.

With the energy level of a punk band, L'Etranger thrashed their way through their repertoire of strongly melodic songs. Vocalist Andy Cash outdid himself with a fiery performance, drummer Pete Duffin provided strong harmonies, Chuck Angus on bass and Bruce P.M. on keyboards supplied frenzied accompaniment and the whole band worked together as a tight unit. They also demonstrated their versatility by trading their instruments and using different instrumental combinations.

Artists like Jane Siberry and the co-writers for L'Etranger, Andy Cash and Chuck Angus, though widely different in musical perspective nevertheless share an important talent that is all too rare in today's music scene and that is their strength as songwriters. If this trend continues Canada may get have a viable voice in the music world. □



Jane Siberry performed at the super-SUB last Friday night, with openers L'Etranger and the Realists playing lively new-wave. Photo: Kimberley Whitchurch, Dal Photo

## Fugard's The Island a fine balance

By RICK JANSON

In the darkness, actor Ruhundwa Ruganda's rhythmic breathing introduced South African playwright Athol Fugard's *The Island*. The stage lights slowly come up exposing a black man shovelling sand. He stops, takes off his shirt, and continues the shovelling to the constant rhythmic breathing.

Fugard's plays are very much about breathing, about silence, and most of all about oppression in South Africa. Oct. 10, 11, and 12 *The Island* was performed at the Dunn theatre as part of a regional tour by Fredericton's Enterprise Theatre.

Ruganda and David Etheridge play two prisoners on South Africa's Robben Island. Ruganda is

servicing a life sentence for burning his passbook in front of a police station. Etheridge, a white man, is serving a 10 year sentence which is later reduced to three—creating the emotional crux for the play.

The breathing, the tension and the oppression is omnipresent throughout the performance despite moments of humour as the prisoners cope with their internment.

Each night they take each other to the movies—one describes a film to the other, the action degenerating into playful rolling about on the stage floor.

Etheridge and Ruganda keep a fine balance in their performance between the tension and the humour. We are allowed to laugh a bit, constantly aware that at any moment the two protagonists could be withdrawn and beaten by the authorities.

A fine veneer of dignity is kept aloft in the degrading situation the two prisoners find themselves in. Despite the humiliation, the actors shout, they sing and they even perform a play within the play.

*The Island* is a very intense performance. The almost bare stage is filled up by the two actors. They move about well, but always return to their two allotted positions balanced apart equidistant from the water bucket at center stage—drawing parallels to the apartheid system itself.

*The Island* was originally written in 1973 with the collaboration of two actors from Fugard's theatre company who had gone through a similar experience on Robben Island.

As in the fictional play, one of the actors imprisoned staged his own version of *Antigone*—the classical Greek play about injustice. While the warders looked upon it as a simple Greek parable, the prisoners got a much deeper meaning from the performance.

In *The Island* Ruganda is asked by the other prisoner to play the role of Antigone, and is coaxed into dressing up as a woman. At first he protests that he'll simply be laughed at. The other counters that at first they will laugh, but after they will listen.

In the Enterprise Theatre version of *The Island* we do laugh, and we do listen.

When the laughing is over we listen to the inhumane treatment of prisoners on Robben Island. We hear about the 500 mile journey they took to get there on a bus, standing up all with way without so much as a break to urinate. We learn about injustice South African style.

In the end, as the white man learns of his imminent freedom, the black man asks him to "count my life." On his fingers the black man counts his life sentence—"One, one, one, one, one, . . . and then one day it'll be over." □

## Women look to artistic roots

By KIMBERLY WHITCHURCH

The retrospective *Back-grounds: Ten Nova Scotian Women Artists* opened at Dalhousie Art Gallery Oct. 11, following Marge Piercy's triumphant lecture in the Feminist Visions series. These two events together were a marvellous symmetry—roots and future in women's work.

Most of the artists exhibited studied and exhibited both here and abroad, long before it was considered acceptable for a young woman to do so. Challenging the conventions of turn of the century Canada, they also became important administrators and instructors. This show is an eloquent lesson to modern day feminists on the art of making it.

The 45 paintings and drawings represent a wide range of styles. Ruth Wainwright constructs Braque-like landscapes, and Elizabeth Styring Nutt's four beautiful canvasses are comparable to the Group of Seven's work. The one exception to this well-educated technical genius is Florence Belcher Payzant, whose gently naïf imagery is evocative of folk art.

The earliest work is by Frances Jones Bannerman, with two canvases from 1882 and one from 1883. *The Conservatory* is an Impressionistic visual poem in light and colour, with vibrant flora glowing in counterpoint to a familiar girl quietly reading.

The portraiture is timeless and fresh; note Edith A. Smith's *The Red Cloak*, pictured above. Mere black-and-white P.M.T.'s do no justice to this scarlet slash decorat-



*The Red Cloak* 1923

ing a strong heroine. You really should see this for yourself. □