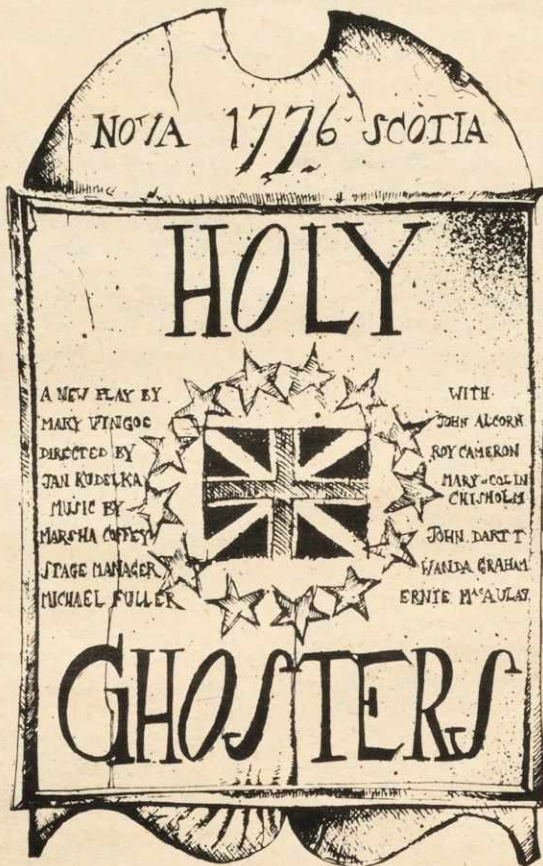


# Holy Ghosters: a faint phantom



by Chris Morash

Civil war? Here? In Nova Scotia? Ridiculous.

In 1776, however, the idea was not quite so far-fetched: with the American colonies rising against England, there were some who thought we should join the rebellion, and actually took arms against the British so that the Stars and Stripes might fly over Nova Scotia.

Against this background, *Holy Ghosters*, a new play from the Mulgrave Road Co-op, shows us a family being ripped apart by conflicting loyalties; to the rebellion, to Britain and to each other. The Mulgrave company is headed in the right direction with this sort of material, but the production unfortunately takes too many wrong turns, and ends up getting lost.

Considering the performances in *Holy Ghosters*, the actors are the most obvious scapegoats for the show's disappointing quality. Mediocrity is the key word here. Some, like John Dartt, sink below

the mediocre to the abysmal; others, such as Wanda Graham and Roy Cameron, rise above it, and give us a very good sense of their characters. But most performers simply wander through the play with only vague ideas about their characters and goals.

This is particularly noticeable—and harmful—in the case of John Alcorn's playing of Richard John Uniacke. Uniacke is supposed to be a charismatic character, "perhaps descended from a unicorn," whose magical personality should be one of the play's driving forces. In Alcorn's hands, the character lacks this drive, and consequently the production loses much of its motivational force.

It is not fair, however, to put the burden of the show's lackluster production solely on the shoulders of the actors; in fact, I am more inclined to point the accusing finger at director Jan Kudelka. She constantly groups the actors in unnatural, tableau-like poses, evoking a stilted feel that robs the play of much of its

potential for strong, genuine emotion, and leaves nothing but pretty pictures in its place.

All too often the actors' mannered movements create an artificiality which alienates them from one another. Only rarely do they actually interact, listen and respond. Consequently, they are unable to inspire each other, and the show loses the one thing it so badly needs—energy.

This lack of energy is accentuated by Kudelka's snail-slow pacing. The second act of the play, particularly, during which events are supposed to be whipping along so fast that the characters get caught up in a swirl of action that leads to their tragedy, should have moved along at breakneck speed; instead, it drags.

All of this is a great pity, for there are some very nice things in *Holy Ghosters*. Designer J.P. Camus has turned out another of the delightfully simple, versatile sets that are fast becoming his trademark. Marsha Coffey's music is beautiful, haunting, imaginative and one of the show's hidden treasures as it accompanies the dream-like slow-motion scene changes. In fact, the scene changes are so effective that they are often better than the scenes themselves.

Perhaps the most frustrating thing about seeing a new Nova Scotian play like this one by Mary Vingoe, is that one senses that it could have been so much better than it is. The script has some powerful ingredients—a love story, a betrayal, the tragedy of innocent people being destroyed because they are trying to do what they think is right. If the fragmented first act was a bit tighter, the overly long second act judiciously trimmed, the character of Uniacke given a bit more vitality and imagination, and the show then given a few more weeks of rehearsal under a different director, *Holy Ghosters* would have the potential to be the same sort of tour de force that the Mulgrave Road Co-op brought us last year with *The Last Salt Gift of Blood*.

As it is, it has the bitter taste of a good idea gone bad.

# Mummer is really sort of a bummer

by David Lutes

XTC has finally released a new studio album, *Mummer*, and I, for one, am not overly impressed. I say this at the risk of incurring the wrath of the many listeners who will no doubt disagree. But don't see this as a negative review. It's just that after all the buildup and critical raves I have seen the final product was a bit of a disappointment.

*Mummer* is hardly a bad record. It's just that it never really lives up to the promise of last year's release, the brilliant "English Settlement." On that one the band seemed to have come of age. Colin Moulding and Andy Partridge, the two songwriters in the group, presented us with a new wave pop style that was

artistic and immensely enjoyable. *Mummer* seems merely to be a half-hearted attempt to live up to that potential.

*Mummer* is a mildly interesting collection of songs which follow the example of the group's established sound. There is an attempt, however, to experiment on some songs with a more avant-garde style, with mixed results. This experimentation consists mainly of the use of more afro-rhythmic drums and a vocal track disruptively imposed over the rest of the music. An example of this is the first cut, "Beating of Hearts."

For the most part XTC sticks to their well-known style. The traditional, acoustic instrumentation still dominates on most cuts and

the unique Partridge/Moulding vocal sound makes this a uniquely XTC product. Songs that stand out are the pastoral "Love on a Farmboy's Wage" and the upbeat "Funk Pop a Roll."

I have to say that I do enjoy *Mummer*. It's just that there seems to be very little inspiration for an album that is being acclaimed by their record company as "a stunner," "challenging" and "progressive." It lacks the bold strangeness of even the middle period *Drums and Wires* and in places seems like a step back. Perhaps the personal problems that have hit the band of late have knocked some wind out of their sails. Let's hope that the next record will be a step up, but for now *Mummer's* holding pattern will suffice.

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