

arts



Nene, Auram, and Boee, three characters in search of meaning in . . . and On The Eighth Day at Vanier.

Bad day for Vanier puppets

. . . and On The Eighth Day
Puppet Theatre directed by Fred Thury
At Vanier College Dining Hall
Closes Saturday

By MARY-LOU ZEITOUN

Yet another post-nuclear holocaust drama has hit the stage, but this has a twist. The main characters are puppets, large naked mutants created by Johan Vandergun.

. . . and On The Eighth Day, written and directed by Fred Thury, is a visually striking, even frightening production, yet there were times when it wore thin—a factor largely due to its running time. It's difficult to crane for a view of the stage in an uncomfortable seat for three hours. Once one has finished marvelling at the production itself—the puppets, the set, the lighting—the story itself appears spare and drawn out.

Thury's mythical story on the evolution of humanity has some funny moments but is painfully idealistic and very, very long.

Kam Gourley plays Avram, the only human character in the play. Avram discovers a group of beast-like, inarticulate mutants who jealously guard their small stores of garbage. He shows them that their "garbage" is actually tins of food, thus enlisting their trust and support. Using his can opener as a symbol of power, he teaches the mutants everything from their names to the constellations in the sky.

As the mutants learn to speak, their personalities become more and more distinct. There are seven of them: Boee, Moni, Neno, Puk, Gro, Han, and Sham. Through the excellent manipulations and voice characterizations of the cast, each character becomes a

delight to watch as their personalities evolve. The character Boee is particularly endearing as the loud boorish, but comic mutant.

The actors providing the voices are as fascinating to watch as the puppets. They line the top level of the set, flashlights eerily illuminating their cowed faces watching his/her character closely to ensure that the puppets appear consistently alive.

They also sing the music, written by Glen Morley. The choice of music provides an absurd anachronism with the rest of the play. Imagine a twisted, drooling mutant spotlighted on the set of a dark sombre garbage pit, the sky dappled with post-nuclear pollution: The mutant snuffles gracelessly to its mutant mate, who has a bare mottled skull and drooping naked breasts, and starts singing a song called "Why Are You," a biffy Broadway insto-melody which rudely, and comically, destroys the sombre atmosphere.

Even so, the Broadway ditties were delivered with feeling and expertise. Sometimes the singers managed actually to surpass the appallingly trite lyrics and saccharine sweet melodies. The music reverberated oddly from the gloomy set, designed by Tom Doherty. The three levels of black risers, glowing red pools of light, and the ozone-layer-destroyed sky create a feeling of forboding and despair.

Although Fred Thury's script was not originally intended for puppets, the puppets are the only reasons it succeeds as well as it does. A lot of talent and work went into this production (there are over 100 people involved). With a lot of editing this show could be as spectacular all round as it is visually. Johan Vandergun's puppets are not to be missed.

'84 York Theatre grads stage Sam Shepard's early works

Farewell performance features four plays by playwright and star of smash hit movie *The Right Stuff*

By MICHELE AUNG THIN

Playwright/actor Sam Shepard, is an ubiquitous fellow. With his *True West* on PBS, *Hawk Moon* at the Toronto Free Theatre, and his role as Chuck Yeager in the hit movie *The Right Stuff*, Shepard is a hard man to overlook. Next week, Feb. 7 to Feb. 10, he will be with us again in the form of *Shepard Blues*—the York Theatre Department will be mounting four of his early plays at the Atkinson Theatre. Directed by Ron Singer, this show represents the final performance of the class of '84.

Because it is a farewell, the cast and crew of *Shepard Blues* have decided to leave a little of themselves behind. One dollar from every

ticket sold will go to the impoverished coffers of the Fine Arts Scholarship Fund. Says a representative of the show, "It's a good cause, and we'd like to put something back into the school."

Shepard is a writer who writes as an artist would paint. He evokes the human condition rather than describe it. From those four plays, written during the first 10 years of his career, emotion is the key to thematic impact.

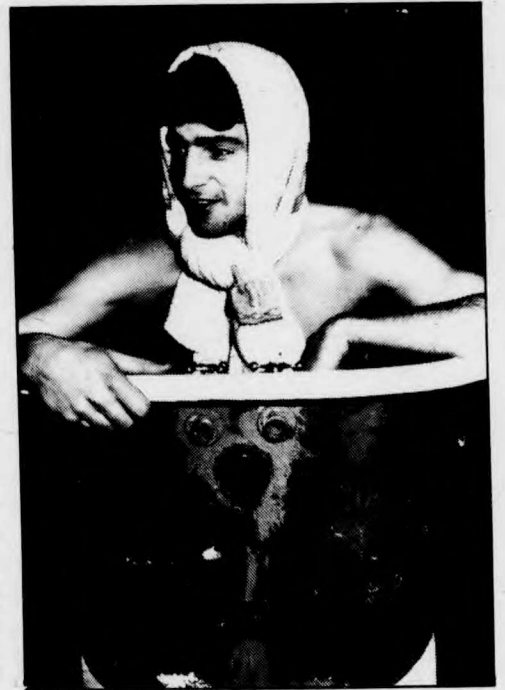
Shepard concerns himself with a reality consumed by myth, and this theme strongly influences this production. Singer's attention to intricate details and emotive style is likely to provide an excellent context for Shepard's work. The set, designed by Kate Greenway, will also reflect theme with its stylized yet realistic interlocking pieces. Patrick Clemence's original music is written expressly for the production.

Shepard's theme of reality versus myth is perhaps an appropriate one for those who plan on braving the forbidding professional world of theatre. Of course, the Atkinson production is no swan song. But it does represent the culmination of four years in all aspects of the theatre; an event designed to launch all of them into the big, bad world of Canadian theatre.

Shepard Blues opens at Atkinson on 7 February and runs until 10 February. Matinees are on the 8th and 10th. Curtain times are 8 p.m. for evening shows, and 3 p.m. for matinees. Tickets are \$2 for York students, \$3 for others.



PHOTOS: TED CHRISTENSEN



Scenes from Shepard's Blues

An evening of one-act plays, *Shepard's Blues* is directed by Ron Singer. The production opens Tuesday at the Atkinson Theatre.

Writing teacher thinks York should make contact with world

By JASON SHERMAN

A list of York's creative writing professors and teachers reads like an index to a work on contemporary Canadian literature: Coles, Davey, Mandel, Nichol Ondaatje. It would be safe to assume that not many of these names would elicit much response among patrons of the "popular" book trade. It would also be safe to assume, without adopting too sycophantic a tone, that not many of them care about the commercial market; rather so, they are writers first, businessmen second.

This attitude bothers at least one member of the creative writing staff, screenwriting teacher Lionel Siegel. He believes it's time York took steps toward linking York with the showbusiness community, and vice versa: "The film department, drama, what have you, should really plug into the professional community—bring them here, go out there, get some action going so that the students have the benefit of these kinds of connections. It's a very closed-type business." Siegel believes Ryerson, for example, "has three legs up on York, executives who are involved with the academics."

Siegel speaks from experience. After graduating in journalism at the University of Missouri he held a number of unrewarding writing positions in New York until landing a post as a literary agent with a firm in Los Angeles. In 1958, he co-wrote a script with one of his clients for the hugely popular TV show *U.S. Steel Hour*, which got him \$50 but no credit. Four part-time jobs later, he was asked by producer Peter Tewksbury to write for the TV show *It's A Man's World* which

led to a permanent position on the original *Peyton Place*, the launching point for Mia Farrow and Ryan O'Neal. His next success came with the granddaddy of schlock television, *The Six Million Dollar Man*.

Most writers might wince, particularly most student writers at York, at the thought of "selling out" to television. Siegel recognizes principles that drive such fertile minds, but, waxing metaphoric, argues "The way to learn how to design a car is to get your hands dirty. You have to understand how everything works and why it works. Then, if you're clever enough, if you're motivated enough, you can get on with whatever you want to do."

And while Siegel agrees that television "has been going downhill for a long time," he still believes it to be a great training ground: "This isn't nice but it's true: If you have something to say and you're willing to compromise what you have to say, then I think that's where you should go."

Compromise is, of course, the operative word here. The way Siegel describes it, the process of whittling away whatever creative genius a writer brings to the networks makes censorship akin to nirvana. "A writer friend of mine," Siegel recalls, "once said, 'What the hell are we talking about, for Christ's sake, what do we mean we want to say something? If you have one scene in a one hour show that really is good and is the way you wanted it to be, that's as good as it gets. The rest of it is plot, bullshit, zip, cut to the flowers.'"

The consoling reassurance that "you can get across a kernel of truth" is a 180-degree turn from what most of the other teachers have to offer. But remember: Siegel is talking about

specifics, TV, radio, film. He cannot abide the naiveté of burgeoning screenwriters who have yet to learn the awful truth: "When I was in L.A., 5 times a day, someone would say 'Well, how do you start writing?' I'd say 'Who do you know in the business?—you know anybody?' 'No, I don't know anybody.' 'Well, what about your relatives, they know anybody?' They'd look at me like I was talking crazy."

Siegel brings all his experience, wit, and patience to Film 212, Introductory Screenwriting. He happened on the post by fluke, having come to York a couple years back hoping to accompany film professor James Beveridge to India. But instead of an itinerary, he had to come up with a syllabus.

He felt then, and still feels to a certain degree, that teaching and writing are contradictions in terms. "As I hear myself talk, sometimes I think, 'Oh, what bullshit!' but I think 'yeah, but someone has to say it, someone has to provide the ground rules!' Teaching writing is a bit of a farce inasmuch as you can't teach it, all you can do is talk about what's written by the students. That's why any writing class that isn't just writing is a waste of time."

Siegel is exactly what the creative writing program needed. He's not the only writer who knows the business side of things—Mavor Moore and Frank Davey come to mind—but he is able to relate what amount to horror stories in such a way that the writing student is at once put on guard, and reassured that it can still be done. "To be a successful writer," Siegel sums up, "you have to be willing to be assertive and aggressive and push yourself; or, get someone to push you. Also, you have to write—I left that out."