

Focusing on blurred priorities

Universal Shelter benefit exposes societal shortcomings

BY JOHN ELMER

On a night of concern and spirit, I felt ashamed. I felt ashamed of the legacy that sadly hung over those in attendance. Throughout the evening of community spirit, support, and generosity there was a truth that lay conspicuously hidden Friday night — a truth that appeared in the form of cultural oppression, domestic violence and ignored peoples.

The staging of the third annual benefit for the Universal Shelter Association in Dalhousie's McInnes Room came with a wave of community support. The fundraiser, silent auction and awareness program drew a sizable crowd, much to the satisfaction of association president Chai Chu Thompson.

Thompson understands the importance of community involvement in a project with a mandate such as the Universal Shelter Association. Landing outside the rapidly shrinking arm of core government funding, Thompson's organization relies on goodwill and support to execute the ultimate goal of the program. There was a feeling of frustration that, as

a society and community, our priorities had strayed so far that an organization like the Universal Shelter Association, the only one of its kind in the province, can receive no core government funding.

Designed to afford culturally sensitive care for victims of domestic violence, the shelter focuses its service on racial and linguistic minorities, homosexuals and peoples of low income. The volunteer-based group has made a profound difference in this province since it started operating in March of 1998.

But on this evening of giving and sharing there was an unavoidable social overtone, beginning when the audience was treated to a spiritual Mi'kmaq sweetgrass blessing ceremony, a ritual to recognize the Creator.

Ceremony leader Noel Knockwood identified alcohol as the "most harmful, evil source to ever come to our people" and asked that the bar be closed and the audience refrain from consuming alcohol during the five minute ritual.

In a period that transcended the atmosphere of the evening, Mr. Knockwood also reminded people

that it was his ancestors who originally allowed our ancestors to step foot on their "holy lands". He appealed for an understanding of the aboriginal purpose — too easily lost sight of in modern culture. When the ceremony ended there were real feelings of regret on account of the lack of understanding throughout the community.

The Universal Shelter Association is looking for volunteers who are able to house victims of domestic abuse. According to Ms. Thompson, the association is looking to establish a network of satellite homes throughout the province with a centralized administration. The organization is especially looking for linguistic and racial minorities, gay men and lesbians to help with the program. Thompson understands that an organization that is rooted in the community is the best avenue for change.

Congratulations to organizers and supporters alike for raising awareness and making a difference. If you wish to get involved in this worthwhile program please contact Joy Emmanuel or Emily Donelan at 454-5459.

Hanging off notes

BY TRISTAN STEWART-ROBERTSON

If you take audience reaction as merit of a good performance, then Michael Burgess' performance last Friday was a tremendous success.

As the opening performance of *Symphony Nova Scotia's* (SNS) 16th season Pops Series, the renowned Canadian tenor of such stage musicals as *Les Miserables* and *Blood Brothers* captivated the sold-out audience.

Burgess' strong and soaring voice cascaded through many favourites from the less traditional and newer generation of Broadway shows. The listeners hung off every note as an early morning dew drop waiting 'til the last possible moment before falling into the next note. Burgess would hold a note and a pin could not have shattered the silence.

The NS audience, always quick to rise in appreciation, was rewarded with the predictable encore — if the man who played Jean Valjean in *Les Mis* doesn't sing a song from that show during the body of the performance, you

can bet he will in an encore. I've never been fond of encores that I know are coming — don't get me wrong, they're always good. But encores and standing ovations used to be a treat, not an expectation.

Nevertheless, Burgess truly did thrill the masses with songs from *Phantom of the Opera*, *Blood Brothers*, *Man of La Mancha*, *Aspects of Love*, *Chess*, the new *Jeckyl & Hyde*, and even a song from *Riverdance*. He was obviously having fun singing and entertaining — always the mark of a good performer.

A nod should also go out to SNS itself. This may have been my first in their Pops Series but the musicians have always impressed me with their skill and talent, with which they play everything from Baroque to Country.

All in all, quite an enjoyable evening — oh, the power of the music of the night!

Special thanks to the organizers at SNS for providing a seat, at the last minute — for a performance sold out for three months.

Angus in Wonderland rock

BY KAREN PARKER

Gordie Sampson played to a packed North Street Church last Tuesday (Oct. 20) at a launch party for his debut CD, *Stones*.

Stones actually hit the shelves of record stores across the country last month, but the Cape Breton singer/songwriter was busy touring with the Rankin Family for most of September. The album, which is on Halifax's turtlemusik label and distributed by A&M, contains a pleasant mix of traditional and pop music.

From the current radio single "Still Workin' on a Dream" to traditional guitar sets like "The Creignish Boogie" and beautiful ballads like "Joseph", there is something for everyone.

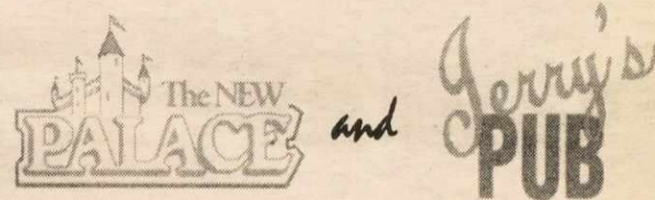
Sampson had a full band with him on Tuesday night. Comprised

of Howie MacDonald on fiddle, Fred Lavery on guitar, Matt Foulds on drums and Ed Woodsworth on bass, the band is collectively known as Angus in Wonderland. They played a short set, which consisted mainly of songs from *Stones*. At one point, they brought up a guest musician — a cellist from Symphony Nova Scotia.

After Gordie's set was done, the crowd set about schmoozing and sampling some of the refreshments. The catering and decorations really played up the *Stones* theme, with cookies that had rune markings carved into them.

Before long, Howie MacDonald and Fred Lavery began jamming in the kitchen of the North Street Church. To avoid starting a mob, both the musicians and their growing audience were shoed into the main area again, where MacDonald and Lavery took to the stage and played for everyone in attendance.

In November, Gordie once again sets off for the UK with the Rankins. Next up on his agenda, however, is a special CD release in Sydney on Halloween. It's sure to be a great time, just like last Tuesday.



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