

# Park pleasures

## Looking ahead to summer, sun, and Shakespeare

**W**ERE you one of the 30,000 folks fortunate enough to last summer to watch Puck make things right in front of the setting sun? Did you marvel at the way the antiquated fortifications of Fort Olgivie seemed to be custom built for the theatre? Did you feel the magic of nature itself pulling you into the fairy kingdom of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*?

Well, you'll have the chance to do it again come July 5. That is when Shakespeare by the Sea remounts *Dream*. But there's more — August 6 to September 1 will see *A Comedy of Errors*, one of Shakespeare's older and most beloved comedies, performed in Cambridge Battery. Then for two weeks in September, an experimental version of *Hamlet* will be staged in Martello tower.

The roster for the Shakespeare by the Sea Company reads like the graduation rolls of the Dalhousie Theatre program. Fifteen of the 17 actors presently scheduled to perform this summer are either graduates of or students at Dalhousie while the director — Patrick Christopher — is a prominent faculty member of the Dal Theatre Department. Local students from NSCAD, headed by Heather Wilkinson, are creating original masks for this summer's production; not an easy task when the cast numbers up to 20. Stephen Osler, a local set designer who has worked with Neptune and Eastern Front Theatre productions, will design the set for the Martello *Hamlet*, and Dalhousie Graduate Michael Mewski will be adapting the play to the building.

I got a taste of what is to come last Friday when I attended a press gathering at the new Shakespeare by the Sea offices. They are located where the old restaurant at the lower entrance to Point Pleasant Park used to be. The afternoon that began with a dull press conference featuring the mayor ("Vim, vigour, and vitality" — whatever, Walter) did not seem to have much promise. But the sun came out and the snow was melting on the ground as the hodgepodge of pressies slip-slid their way up to Martello Tower. For some bizarre reason, I felt a weird combination of the thrill of fame and the cheap feeling that I was schmoozing with career reviewers.

Any ill feeling I was having disappeared instantly when the first actor leaped out from behind a tree to deliver her lines. It was a passionate rendition of one of Helena's speeches from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* that progressed, with the aid of rapidly appearing performers, into various other short scenes around the tower.

I had never been inside Martello tower before Friday, but the instant I stepped into the low-ceilinged cellar I could sense the inherent atmosphere before a word was spoken. There are so many natural theatrical spaces in the centuries old building; from the dungeon-like space in the basement to the acoustically ideal high ceilings of the middle floor. The alcove windows could not be more perfect for the inner thought

of soliloquy as was shown by Matthew Witherly's *Hamlet*. Witherly showed off the theatrical promise of the venue as he strode with rage and frustration through the throng of notebooks and video cameras, pacing the circular floor.

As the press group broke out onto the roof, the sun broke out from the clouds. One of the final bits was Ben Stone's rendition of *Henry V's* St. Crispin's Day speech, one of my personal Shakespearean favourites. When things were finally over, there was enthusiastic applause from the crowd, mostly made up of media types who I had assumed would be of the jaded, bitter type. For some reason, they seemed to be excited.

I talked to director Patrick Christopher about some of the ideas Shakespeare by the Sea will be trying out for *Hamlet*, a site-specific piece running for 12 shows Sept 3-8 and 10-15.

# Dance, Dance Away

BY TIM COVERT

**S**MOKE filled the stage and four towers were silhouetted by multicolored lights shining through the fog. Four figures emerged, their forms echoing those of the towers. The group broke into song, reverb dripping off the speakers, voices soaring above the thundering roar of the...bodhran?

As cheesy an 80's rock scene as this is, it was how Great Big Sea took to the stage Saturday night in the McInnes room. Packed to the gills, the crowd was whipped into a dancing, cheering frenzy by the Newfoundland quartet. Voted Entertainers of the Year last month at the East Coast Music Awards, Great Big Sea showed how they earned that award, their limitless energy far outlasting that of the audience.

It has been said that as Celtic/traditional musicians, Great Big Sea are not that incredible, but that it's the showmanship and sheer entertainment value of the group that makes them so popular. There are likely many who could play as well, but few who could exude as much energy and fun.

Opening appropriately in the fog with "The Chemical Worker's Song," the band continued through songs off of their two albums, concentrating on tunes from their most recent release, *up*. The band often stopped to talk to the crowd and shamelessly promote their record. This wasn't annoying, though it would be coming from a band that took themselves more seriously than Great Big Sea.

Guitarist/vocalist Alan Doyle mentioned their tour with Blue



Matthew Witherly  
HAMLET

Ophelia's drowning might take place in the ocean, with the whole audience trooping down to the shore. When the difficulty of pulling this off effectively was mentioned, he said, "Well, we'll just have to get 12 Ophelias then." The funeral might take place at the woodpile in Point Pleasant Park, where there are many scattered granite remnants of fortifications that naturally imply a graveyard. Christopher painted a vivid picture of the whole scene: audience members will all have black armbands and umbrellas and, with the cooperation of the fog, flashlights will give an incredible torches-in-the-night effect.

Shakespeare by the Sea's pro-

ductions are, as they say, nice at twice the price. With a suggested donation of \$5, these shows are a bargain for their quality. And those who can't afford it can still come — the productions do not limit enjoyment by financial status.

And hey, when your logo is of slash Willie himself in killer shades, how could you go wrong? If you're in Halifax this summer, then look no further than Point Pleasant Park when the inevitable "I'm bored/A movie's too expensive" argument kicks in.



# The box

The final production of the Dalhousie Theatre Department will open this coming Tuesday in the Sir James Dunn Theatre of the Dalhousie Arts Centre. Continuing the tradition of ending the season with Shakespeare, his *Love's Labour's Lost* will run until Saturday the 30th. Performances are at 8 p.m. nightly with a Saturday matinee at 2 p.m. Tickets are available at the Arts Centre box office and are \$5 for students and \$12 regular. For more information, call 494-7081 or 494-3820.

The Saint Mary's University Art Gallery will be holding an opening reception this coming Wednesday at 8 p.m. for *Painting Spirit: Recent Work* by Barbara Berry and Terri Robin Vernon. Berry and Vernon — both artists living in Nova Scotia — will talk about their work April 10 at 8 p.m. at the gallery. Berry's sculptural paintings "convey a sense of the energetic poetry and mystery of nature" while Vernon's recent work "is a record of [her] visual explorations into concepts of spirituality, symbolism, and mythology." *Painting Spirit* runs until April 28.

Baroque violinist, and master of "old-style" Cape Breton fiddling, David Greenberg leads the group Puirt a Baroque in a concert this Saturday at St. Andrew's United Church on Coburg Road. Puirt a Baroque — Scottish Gaelic for "tunes from the baroque" — represents the "juxtaposition of Scottish/Cape Breton traditional music with Baroque art music, an idea which has its precedent in eighteenth-century 'Scots drawing room music.'" The trio is rounded out by musical whirlwind Scott Macmillan on guitar and harpsichordist David Sandall. The group has recorded a CD, *Bach Meets Cape Breton*. The concert, beginning at 8 p.m., will feature music from the Baroque era and traditional Cape Breton music, as well as newly composed tunes. Tickets are \$15 for adults and \$12 for students/seniors.

Gordon Laird will be showing his work *New Atlantis* at the eyelevelgallery starting this coming Tuesday. At 7 p.m. that night there will be an opening reception held at the gallery, located at 1672 Barrington Street. Laird will discuss his work on Saturday, March 30 at 8 p.m. The exhibition runs until April 13.

The final film of the Dalhousie Art Gallery's Modern Painting and Sculpture series will be screened this Wednesday at the gallery in the Dal Arts Centre. *Painters Painting* takes a look through the eyes of documentarian Emile de Antonio at the lives and work of fourteen New York artists from 1940 to 1970. Artists such as Stella, de Kooning, Pollock, Johns, Warhol, Noland, Motherwell, and Pavia are included in the film, which plays at 12:30 p.m. and 8 p.m.

### CONCERT REVIEW

Great Big Sea  
Friday, March 15  
McInnes Room

Rodeo that brought them to the McInnes room over a month ago, saying the rock icons had "closed" for them. Doyle talked about how the Great Big Sea had shown Ontario band around the bars on George Street in Newfoundland. He then nicely segued into "The Old Black Rum."

Sean McCann, who plays the bodhran and guitar, is the most vocally talented member of the group. This was particularly evident in his renditions of the traditional dirge "General Taylor" and the unusually honest original ballad "Fast As I Can." Doyle ripped his way with relative success through a cover of REM's "The End of the World As We Know It" as the band continued its tradition of including rock tunes in their stage shows.

Great Big Sea was celebrating an anniversary on Friday, three years to the day since their first gig. The group, which also includes bassist Darrell Power and fiddler/accordion player Bob Hallett, toasted their success and led the crowd in a "Happy Anniversary" sociable.

The band has much to celebrate. They just returned from a trip to Poland where they won awards at a folk song festival. Doyle said that the highlight of the trip was listening to 3,600 Polish singers doing a rendition of "Whadaya At?". The band immediately rocked into the song which included — "in the spirit of national unity" — the french version of the chorus.

"Qu'est-ce qui c'est passé? Comment ça va, Buddy? Qu'est-ce qui c'est passé aujourd'hui?"

Great Big Sea played an extended medley of "Come Along With Me," "Cecilia," and "Tell My Ma" that seemed to last forever and almost did for the dancing crowd. They then re-energized the audience with a proud rendition of "Rant and Roar," and finished off their exhaustive first set with a version of "Mari-Mac" that reached speeds well in excess of the limits for public dancing safety.

The band was quickly back out for an encore to the rhythmic chanting of "Great Big Sea. Great Big Sea." With a reference to Monty Python's *The Search for the Holy Grail*, they launched into their hit cover "Run Runaway." After a few more songs, the band left the stage only to be called out for a second encore. I started to wonder if the audience was comprised of masochistic fools.

Bob Hallett, it was announced, was going to sing a tune his grandfather taught him. I was afraid I was going to drop dead from exhaustion if a slow tune was played. It turned out the 'ancient tune' was a Great Big Sea take on The Violent Femmes' "Blister in the Sun" that included brief digressions into "Dee Do Do Dee Da Da Da" by The Police and The Doors' "Break on Through." As a perfect finale, the band broke into a rollicking version of "It's the Bye."

There was no question about a third encore. The band was too tired, the crowd was way too tired, and as they emerged from the SUB, dripping, the aura was completely post-coital. So much energy expended, all in the name of pure pleasure.