

By Kwame Dawes

The Real Inspector Hound

By Tom Stoppard

Directed by Kathleen Scherf

Designed by Danny Silk

Costume design by Holly Bulman

Cast: M. Price, Willy Hodgson, Frank Findlay, Genevieve Bosse, Jason Meldrum, Melinda Arseneau, Paula Dawson, Kyle Scott, Steve Comeau, Catonia Whalen.
Memorial Hall, UNB.

COMEDY IS NEVER EASY TO EXECUTE ON STAGE.

Timing is all important. The audience, aware that the play is supposed to be funny, arrive with full intention of being entertained and amused, however an important feature of its attitude at the outset of a show is a kind of stubborn dare, you know?: the "Make me laugh if you can," or "So this is going to be funny, eh, let's see?" attitude.

Scandalous Productions, a fledgling pseudo-academic (it is part of a course offered by the English Department) amateur company based on campus decided to take up the challenge of satisfying such an audience in their new show *The Real Inspector Hound*. Tom Stoppard's play is a funny, and a cleverly constructed spoofing of the world of theatre. On the one hand he spoofs the tired and overdone drama mystery genre epitomized in the extremely popular play *The Mouse Trap*, and on the other, he takes to task, with the kind of vicious relish that only a theatre practitioner can, the behaviour of critics.

The Real Inspector Hound is a send off production with witty one-liners and tremendous room for slap-stick comedy playing. Timing is of the essence in this show, and the innovative abilities of actors are essential if the play is to work.

The show I saw on Wednesday night (an invited Dress Rehearsal) succeeded in amusing me. I was impressed with the way the actors captured the sense of exaggerated comic playing which is imperative for this kind of show. Of significant merit was the performance of **Paula Dawson** whose comic style is quite impressive. She is a confident actress who has learnt to make as much use of her non-speaking moments as she does those in which she speaks. Her portrayal of lady Muldrum, the aging, but passionate mistress of the manor, complete with idiotic soap-operatic lines, and cliched posturings was highly amusing. At times her co-actors missed immense opportunities to exploit the rapid exchange of witticisms that is the hall-mark of this play by their lack of timing. Dawson puts relish and energy in her performance and despite the vacuousness of the character she was playing, one could see an actress who was thinking on stage.

The performance of **Melinda Arseneau** as the at-

tractive but high-strung Felicity was also enjoyable. Arseneau's reading of the character was fitting but at moments she appeared not to capitalize on the freedom that this spoofing style allowed her. **Genevieve Bosse's** portrayal of Mrs. Drudge was perhaps the most difficult role in the play. Drudge, the slack-witted servant of the manner has extremely few lines but her onstage time rivals that of the two critics in the balcony. She literally kills time with her boring ritual of cleaning a clearly spotless living room. Bosse's care to fill the spaces with spare boredom required absolute concentration. I was fascinated watching her carry out this thankless piece of acting with such care for the rhythm of the play itself.

The male players in the production included **Willy Hodgson** who plays the "nerdish" critic Moon who is bogged down by an intense inferiority complex. His casting was appropriate and he managed a number of the lengthy and involved speeches of the critics with some power and intelligence. One had the sense, though, that while both himself and **Frank Findlay** who plays Birdboot, another critic, understood something of the physicality of their parts, they seemed to pay less attention to diction and timing. Much of the dialogue, which is absurdly funny, was lost because of rushed speech and poor emphasis. This can only improve with more confidence and control.

Jason Meldrum as Simon, **Kyle Scott** as Magnus, and **Steve Comeau** as the Inspector Hound handle their parts competently. Meldrum's Simon lacked that subtle edge that would make his alleged danger as the mad man on the loose more plausible, even if ludicrous. He plays the part with a smattering too much naivete. Simon is to be played as a "cad" albeit caricatured "cad." With just a tad more sleaziness, Meldrum would have the appropriate combination of idiot and sleaze needed for the part. Scott's Magnus delivers the one-line "I think I will go oil my gun" with excellent relish and it draws from the audience deserving laughter. His non-speaking moments, particularly during the moribund scene of the tea pouring, are hilariously executed.

Kathleen Scherf with her team of designers (**Danny Silk**) and costume artists (**Holly Bulman**) have done a good job with this play. There are a few moments in which the complex confusion of the plots and revised plots remain a huge muddle because of the absence of clarity and timing in the performance of the actors. These however, are the most difficult moments in Stoppard's play and on the most part they come off competently. Perhaps, once the jitters of opening night have passed, there will be greater concentration which will result in far better timing and more intelligent rendering of the dialogue in those important scenes.

The Real Inspector Hound is not going to change

Paula Dawson shines in the Real Inspector Hound

your life. It is light comedy that seeks to entertain the pants off you. You will invariably laugh and be impressed with some of the talent on campus. The only person who may feel some kind of apprehension after watching the show would be the critic. The play is really about murdering critics. They all die at the end of the play. Maybe that is why I have been so generous in this review. (That is a joke)

The students of the English 3150 should be commended on the production. My personal feeling is that the class should try something more daring and challenging next season. In the mean time go catch the show, and be very watchful, gunshots will ring through the Memorial Hall space and startle the daylights out of you.

The Real Inspector Hound continues its run tonight and ends on Saturday the 29th. The show begins at 8.00 pm. each night.

Simon cooks up a tasty international stew in Central Park

A television concert

By Kwame Dawes

I JUST HAPPENED TO BE FLICKING THROUGH THE CHANNELS ON TELEVISION THE OTHER day when I came across the opening song of Paul Simon's most recent Live Concert in New York's Central Park. I could not change channels after that. The sound was incredibly clear and the entire performance was shot with such care and professionalism that I was completely drawn into the mood of the show. In many ways I am glad I was unable to make it to the actual show which hit New York in late Summer this year.

Paul Simon is a consummate artist with minimal stage presence but tremendous talent as a song-writer, arranger, and singer. Above all, Simon has the uncanny capacity and where-with-all to surround himself with some of the most dynamic musicians in the world. Consider the line up of musicians for this show. Four Brazilian percussionists with enough drums and exotic percussion instruments to fill several Tony Music Boxes, and with enough talent to have handled the entire show on their own; a drummer with jazz and latino licks that would stun any listener, and to top it off, with the capacity to slip into reggae one drop licks on a whim; three guitarists, one from South Africa, another from the Cameroons and the third from Botswana; two key-board players, one from South Africa, and the other who sounded like an American gospel/jazz pianist; three back-up singers from Los Angeles; three horn players - one from Brazil, and two Americans; a bass player from the Cameroons; and then (for one song) about eight members of a Brazilian drum core! In the midst of all this incredible talent was Paul Simon, a man with a wonderful lyrical wit and beautiful and evocative melodies that are tauntingly edged by the spare percussive nature of the other musicians.

The show included much of the material from the new *Rhythm of the Saints* LP as well as some of the material from *Graceland*. Simon then did some reinterpretations of some of the old standards like "Bridge over Troubled Waters," which shifted from a heavy duty jazz styling, to a gospel feel and then laying comfortably into a reggae groove. He also performed, virtually solo, two classic tunes: "Still Crazy After All These Years" and "The Boxer" with a tasteful guitar solo executed by the South African guitarist who has been with the band since the *Graceland* project.

Simon's arrangement for many of the songs clearly changed to suit the percussive bent in the musicians that were playing with him. This only made things a tad more unpredictable and ensured that one was not left with the impression that these artists were not creating and shaping stylings while they played. The two new

guitarists, one from Botswana and the other from the Cameroons demonstrated effectively the distinctive quality of African lead guitar playing. Percussive and melodic at once, the playing gave the song "Proof" a haunting quality that could not have been achieved in any other way. On "Call Me Al", the bass player from the Cameroons relished the bass solo by doubling the tempo normally used for it. His licks are funky complete with sweetly executed slaps and mutes.

One missed the strong African vocalizations in many of the *Graceland* tunes. The L.A. trio who backed Simon up bring a more poppy quality to the tunes. They are skilled singers who perform with joy and energy and they are best during the blatantly pop tunes of the past. On a tune like "Diamonds on the Soles of her Shoes," one missed the stark antiphonal stylings of Lady Smith Black Mombazo. The L.A. trio granted the *capela* sections a certain "Beatlesque" sweetness that seemed a bit over-indulgent.

But I am nit-picking. The show confirmed my conviction that the fusion of world music is something that can bring wonderful results anywhere in the world. Some have accused Simon of exploiting the talents of musicians from developing countries. I don't know what the economics of the relationship between Simon and these musicians are, but none have complained as yet. What I can see is not a bunch of artists cowering under the influence of Simon who is trying to steal centre stage on their thunder, but a group of confident artists who are aware of the fact that it is their contribution, their distinctive style of playing, their cultural conditioning that has so effectively come to bear on the work of the other musicians to produce an incredible sound. The music is unabashedly Afro-centric and this is perhaps what appeals to me. There is nothing profound about the popularity of such a style of music in North America, after all, rock music is Afro-centric - it privileges rhythm. What Simon has managed to accomplish is not to be underestimated. He has given the world the chance to see that guitar-heroes, bass players, drummers and percussionist do not all live in the United States. He has shown big name artists that they still have a lot to learn from artists who have been plugging away at a craft with greater talents and skills without due recognition. Music is universal and this is confirmed in Simon's work.

So while I may be guilty of falling into the tragic trap of encouraging the anonymity of the artists (I really don't know their names), I encourage everyone to see the show or purchase the recording of it. You will be impressed.