

# Entertainment

"If I stepped out of my body I would break into blossom..."

—James Wright—

## "Wilderness Lake": Open country joy

Mike Fisher

The Canadian personality first gained expression two hundred years ago when we, as a nation, began to wrestle beavers into bags. Paddling forth to conquer, we rode upstream through boreal mists, into the alien North. We have since come to regard our encounters with nature through art, as a means of exploring our inner nature. New sophisticated and self-reflective, the country's nervous system is not the Hudson Bay Company, but rather the CBC. We continue to wrestle the beaver, but today it is a symbol of our identity.

From out of this cultural bog marches a nationally acclaimed composer. R. Murray Schafer, with a twelve-piece trombone group named Sonare and a forty-five member film crew at his heels. They set up camp in a hunting lodge overshadowed by ancient Ontario woodland, and in the chill October morning make a pilgrimage to an uninhabited lake, where they film and record, at dawn and dusk, the performance of **Music For Wilderness Lake**. "The idea I had was to move music out of the concert hall, into another environment," says Schafer. "What happens when



Music for Wilderness Lake evokes the spirit of an uninhabited lake.

musical intruders confront wilderness?"

A unique Canadian event. The music was commissioned by the CBC, and the film, a thirty-minute documentary overseen by York alumni Niv Fichman, Barbara Sweete and Larry Weinstein of Fichman-Sweete Productions, was funded by the Ontario Arts Council and private investors. "But at first nobody, including the CBC, was interested" points out Fichman from his Toronto office. "They thought Murray was crazy," he laughs. "Finally, John Reeves of CBC became interested in the project and contacted Stan Fox at York's film department. Stan

knew that Barbara and I had some experience in producing musical documentaries, and he put us in touch with Murray." He laughs again. "We discovered that Murray hadn't even written the music yet! So he wrote the music and worked on the film with us simultaneously." Schafer comments, "I knew from the beginning that it should be a film." He adds dryly, "I mean, under the circumstances, I doubt that it will be my most performed work."

He is probably right. The film begins with someone remarking how strange the music sounds. Rehearsing the piece in a barn

outside his North Ontario home, Schafer interrupts the musicians to demonstrate for them how to cry like a wolf. "If we do it right, they might come out," he says enthusiastically, and the camera closes in on the uncertain face of a confused concert-hall trombone player, who later diligently howls like a wolf without taking his eyes from the music.

"Nobody knows what the origin of music was, but quite probably we can assume that a lot of musical noises started as imitation of natural sounds," says Schafer. "Originally, music was made outdoors, in dialogue with

nature. If there is a specific message in this performance, it is to conceive of a kind of music which sings to the trees, and lets the trees sing back."

However, musicians do not often allow themselves to be dropped off at strategic sound points around the rim of a mist-obscured lake, where the maestro cues them with coloured flags. And Toronto audiences do not drive hundreds of miles north to attend performances planned exclusively for dawn and dusk. The magic of this film is that it captures a one-performance, important event: a group of musicians wander into the open jaw of the North, and with twelve trombones attempt to woo that old monster of Can. Lit., nature. Perhaps the best description of this film was inadvertently expressed by one of the trombone players. Standing awkwardly before the camera, he explained that "when I first read this score, I didn't know whether it was the music we were going to play or a map to the place we were going to." The music is a map, and the film an unusual journey into the Canadian psyche.



First off let me tell you that I don't want to be a playwright, I want to be a rock and roll star. I want that understood right off. I got into writing plays because I had nothing else to do. So I started writing to keep from going off the deep end. That was back in '64. Writing has become a habit. I like to yodel and dance and fuck a lot. Writing is neat because you do it on a very physical level. Just like rock and roll. A lot of people think playwrights are some special brand of intellectual fruit cake with special answers to special problems that confront the world at large. I think that's a crock of shit. When you write a play you work out like a musician on a piece of music. You find all the rhythms and the melody and the harmonies and take them as they come. So

Director of **Cowboy Mouth**, actor in **Suicide in B Flat**, Ric Sarabia, playwright Sam Shepard, and some words

### tonight at 8 and midnite Babel on

andrew c. rowsome

"he sleeps on my stomach 'cause my stomach is today..." that particular today is already over. a chronicle of sorts has been given life this week at the samuel beckett theatre. a nostalgia feast for times just barely passed. at some point in the early '70s, patti smith and sam shepard locked themselves in a dingy/reputedly filthy hotel room and typed a play entitled **cowboy mouth**. it was before patti had begun her long/painful (for her former admirers) plummet from grace. it was before sam shepard would win the pulitzer price for **buried child**. this does not in any way discount its value as a document in which respect this play is invaluable. ideas are touched on/discarded/exhumed and ridiculed. the whole mythology/mysticism/christianity that was later to destroy patti's credibility is offered up without sarcasm and in a rather astonishingly innocent form. this particular production exploits the innocence to the utmost. we sense the internal

fragility of the characters very clearly. even the lobster man begins as cuddly and soft rather than a spiny monster.

donna lipchuck is at her best when submitting seduction or caressing the dead raymond. i would have liked to see a slightly harder edge to her character but several moments rang so true as to dispel any doubts. scott thompson gives quite simply a spectacular performance. in terms of sheer energy/bravado he is startling, combined with unexpected nuances he creates an exceptionally compelling persona. the lobster man, silvio oliviero, provides the dramatic inversion necessary to give the more-than-slightly rambling script a coherent focus. ric serbia and the samuel beckett theatre should be supported in this fairly daring endeavour. the space has been exploited effectively and a challenging/flawed play has been given an admirable production. Tonight at 8 and midnite.

Bryon Johnson

## Shepard's death music

Leora Aisenberg

"I rolled over four times once in a Renault Dauphine while stoned on Benzedrine and landed right side up in a gas station with nothing but the wind knocked out of me."

—Sam Shepard

Elvis Costello's "Watching the Detectives" plays in the background. Masking tape forms the outline of a body on the floor. Enter the piano player, hiding his face in his coat. The audience snickers.

Sam Shepard's play **Suicide in B Flat** combines many audacious images and a few sour notes to result in a compelling, elusive composition.

The play begins comfortably with a familiar comic element, the Abbot and Costello type detective team. Walter Villa plays the large, bearded, ulcer-ridden *Lieutenant*, while Dan Lett gives an exciting performance as his bumbling, phlegmatic sidekick. The two detectives are purportedly investigating the suicide (murder?) of Niles (Phil Hogarth), a large-than-life composer.

Miles resides in a house with some of his "groupies": a bitchy bass player and a bizarre saxophonist who calls himself "the scum of the earth." The bass player, played by Marilyn Norry, serves as a mere piece of furniture which occasionally quips and plunks. Unfortunately, her performance is little more than a standard emulation. Ric Sarabia, however, fascinates the audience with a semi-grotesque performance, silently playing his lament and feeding the detectives with rhetorical clues.

On the surface, the play revolves around Miles' apparent death. Was it suicide? Murder? Did he even die? Yet as Shepard's witticisms unfold, the questions become irrelevant. The significance lies in why Miles is dead, spiritually, as an artist. Phil Hogarth portrays Niles as an alienated, grandiose character, plagued with self-doubt, and

hounded by parasitic followers. Perhaps the most insightful scene occurs when the saxophonist confronts Niles on the street, drawing him back to his house and his past.

In an autobiographical sketch, Shepard puts "stranger", "shadow", "pistol" and "cowboy" on his list of favorite words. It is no wonder, therefore, that Niles' alter ego is a Jesse James like cowboy/sniper, who returns home to eliminate those

who insist on occupying his house, holding back his chance to start anew. Notes the saxophonist: "The similarities between positions of birth and positions of death are too awesome to ignore."

The strength of the play lies in Shepard's ability to enhance recognizable characters with twisting innuendoes. Indeed, it is the script which makes **Suicide in B Flat** "alive till the moment it 'Dies.'"

## Something beautiful

Frank McGee

**That Little Something Special** presented last week in Mac Hall was an astounding talent display that has probably raised a few eyebrows in York's performing community.

The show, directed and beautifully choreographed by Alix Chochinov was a musical tour of "vaudeville, revue, and the old minstrel show" led enchantingly by John Huston as the wizard and John Burke as Mr. Tinsle Town.



Craig Hildebrand

And Rocky Horror too

Burke excelled as the beguiling Town. It's rare that one sees a student performer in possession of such a professional presence. All his introductions and numbers were done with a crisp, confident finesse. Such song and dance numbers as his inspired "Give My Regards To Broadway" and "I Can Do That" won him a justifiably enthusiastic and spontaneous round of applause.

Mr. Tinsle Town guided us to the bumbling Susie and Johnnie played by Ann Winnett and Walter Teres. The two of them joyously flaunted their comic ability throughout the hour and a

half show. Teres stopped the show as the willing victim of the seductive Kitty Naughton in the "Smoke Gets In Your Eyes" number. Miss Winnett's charming squeals and mannerisms stole entire cast numbers such as the Ziegfeld Follies, and her ability to demurely belt out ballads like "My Man" was winning.

Chochinov strategically placed a powerhouse of voice talent in Kitty Naughton and Kelly Salloum at the beginning of Act II. Miss Naughton's full, rich voice gave Gershwin's "Summertime" the emotional potency it deserves; the audience was left breathless. Kelly Salloum was entrancing in her definitive renditions of "Hello Dolly" and "The Lady is a Tramp" which sparked with her own enthusiasm.

Bouquets go to Stephen Conger's hysterical Sarah Bernhardt; Stephen Hartnell's Eddie Cantor, and Pamela Guent as the Wizard's witty marionette.

The chorus numbers were precise and emitted an exuberant energy throughout the evening.

The musical direction of Graham Thompson was consistent in providing a firm foundation for the cast to work from.

For anyone who missed "That Little Something Special" it's unfortunate because I'm sure it won't be too long before we'll have to pay to see these performers again.