

The Anniversary Review

by Mimi

Last week's performances of *The Anniversary* at Memorial Hall gave audiences a glimpse of what it would be like to live in a very special kind of family. The kind of dysfunctional family Oprah would love to have as guests on her show. No, make that Geraldo.

A British comedy written by Bill MacIlwraith, *The Anniversary* was performed by Stage Left Productions as part of this season's Theatre UNB series. The director, Paula Dawson, and the cast dealt with tricky material quite competently and even with some flair. Members of the play's dysfunctional family are headed by a domineering matriarch, Mum, Tom or "little Tommy Tucker" as Mum annoyingly calls him, is the youngest son trying to break free of Mum's control. Terry is the frustrated middle son with a wife, Karen, who has a relationship of polite hostility with Mum. Henry is the eldest son, a quiet middle-aged man who is completely un-assertive and also happens to be a closet transvestite. Last but not least is Shirley, Tom's fiancée, the unwitting catalyst of the family revolt against Mum. One of the things that fascinated me about this cast was the fact that the "sons" really did resemble each other enough to be brothers. Well, I thought so. Kudos to whoever did make-up.

The event bringing this happy bunch together under one roof is "the anniversary" celebration of Mum and Dad's marriage. Despite the fact that Dad is deceased. To add to the festivities, Tom has decided to spring a little surprise on Mum and announce his engagement to Shirley. Shirley gets her own surprises, when she finds out how bizarre Tom's family is, and the fact that Tom has already had two fiancées scared away by Mum. Also, Terry has to tell Mum about his plans to move to Canada with his own family, and then somehow find the nerve to go through with it after facing Mum's expected opposition. Things get even more complicated when Henry ends up on

the run from the police after being caught stealing lingerie off neighborhood clotheslines. The story turns on Mum's attempts to maintain absolute control over her sons. The entire cast was impressive in their intuitive sense of the proper family dynamic to pull off the story with believability. The plot had some pretty wild twists and turns in it. Mum, of course, prefers for her sons to remain unmarried so that she won't have any competition for their attention—even to the point of trying to murder Terry's wife, Karen. The sons make attempts to break away from Mum, but their attempts are halfhearted. Tom is the most openly defiant son, although he puts off a direct confrontation with her.

Alison Luke was amazing as Mum. She captured the right element of melodramatic behaviour that domineering personality types use to stay the centre of attention. She was believable as the manipulative lunatic who has brainwashed her sons into seeing her as dependent upon them, rather than the other way around. Luke's performance was so convincing, I actually heard audience members whispering "kill her". Mature audience members.

Greg Doran, Steve MacIsaac and Matthew Tierney (Tom, Terry and Henry respectively) did wonderful performances as the persecuted brothers. Melinda Arseneau and Erin Fellows also turned out fine performances as Shirley and Karen. If I had to pick out the funniest cast members, I'd have to say Matthew Tierney as Henry and Erin Fellows as Karen. Tierney's Henry had an eerie resemblance to Mr. Rogers that I found interesting. Fellow's brought the house down when her character finally snapped and lunged for Mum's throat, not an easy thing to do on cue.

Still, the play was uneven. My advice to the cast members would be to not be so self-conscious about playing to the back row BECAUSE WHEN YOU TRY TO SPEAK TOO LOUDLY IT MAKES YOUR DELIVERY SOUND AN ITSY BIT STILTED TO THE REST OF US. When the cast kept a subdued, steady tone the

play went more smoothly. Perhaps it would've made a difference if I'd sat in the balcony, but I doubt it. Mem Hall is pretty small.

One might wonder how a family full of bitter, disturbed characters could be the stuff that comedies are made of, but the fact that *The Anniversary* is British in origin explains it. It has been described as a "farical black comedy" that is, it has a lot of ridiculous situations and sadistic humour in it. The *Blackadder* program is a perfect example of this kind of comedy. Or think of *Faulty Towers*, especially Mrs. Faulty's shrewish behaviour towards Basil or Basil's pummeling of Manuel. The more fierce this abusive brand of humour gets, the more it makes me squirm. But the "Brits" seem to love it. The audience at Mem Hall seemed to like it too, particularly when Mum insisted upon manhandling Shirley to give her a more thorough inspection.

The Anniversary lagged badly when the humour was felt to be a bit too, well, inappropriate as far as the audience was concerned. Reactions to Mum's incestuous overtures towards Tom (including a long, raunchy kiss on the mouth) ranged from giggles to gasps of disgust. When Shirley was apparently having a miscarriage, nobody seemed to find the scene very funny. I sensed an awkward quietness in the hall. I suspect that these spots may have been jokes that were unfortunately a bit dated, since I think the play was written about 20 years ago. I can't even imagine John Cleese getting a laugh with some of the material I saw, and the play almost fell flat on it.

If black comedies are your thing, and you either missed *The Anniversary* or you saw it and want more, rest easy. Theatre UNB will be putting on Alan Ayckbourn's *A Chorus of Disapproval*, also a British comedy, the last weekend of March. Other upcoming Theatre UNB productions include "the world's greatest sex comedy" *Lysistrata*, February 18, 19 & 20 and Adam Nashman's *Orpheus* April 1, 2 & 3.

AT THE ART CENTRE

SIGHT UNSEEN

FEB 14-MAR 15

A touring exhibition of 16 etchings and mezzotints by printmaker Dan Steeves, a native of Moncton and graduate of Mount Allison University. Organized and circulated by the Owens Art Gallery, Sackville, NB. Gemey Kelly, Director of the Owens Gallery will open the exhibition.

ARTWHYS: NEW WORKS

FEB 14-MAR 15

Artists Rick Burns, Toby Graser, Philip Iverson, Anna Wagner-Ott, Bev Thornton and Lucille Robichaud present a range of expressions in a variety of media in this collective exhibition. Opening remarks will be made by Charlotte Glencross, Visual Arts Officer for the Department of Municipalities, Culture and Housing.

Admission is free, all Welcome

The UNB Art Centre is located in Memorial Hall on the UNB Campus.
Weekdays 10:00 - 5:00
Sundays and Holidays 2:00 - 4:00 pm.
call 453-4623

CAE ONSTAGE

COUNCIL OF THE ARTS
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FREDERICTON

Fredericton: A gifted Russian pianist who has made her home in Bathurst since 1990 will appear in concert in Fredericton, Ludmila Knezikova - Hussey will perform Monday, February 8th at 8 p.m. at the Playhouse.

Studying and performing in Russia and Czechoslovakia from a young age, Ms. Knezikova - Hussey has received numerous scholarships and awards as well as rave reviews for her brilliant technique, warm voiced tone and broad repertoire. She has performed throughout Europe and North America as a soloist and accompanist, and with chamber groups, symphony orchestras and choirs. She is also a respected teacher of music. Ms. Knezikova - Hussey will perform Strauss' Arabesque on the Beautiful Blue Danube, Ficher's Sonata No. 5, and works from Bach, Debussy, Brahms, Schumann and Liszt.

Robert Meade, chairperson of Fredericton's Council of the Arts which sponsors the ONSTAGE series, expressed his pleasure at showcasing such a unique musical talent. "Our audience is looking forward to this performance in her adopted Province", he added.

Although the show is almost sold out to subscribers, a limited number of tickets may be available after 7 p.m. on the night of the performance at The Playhouse.

The next concert in the 1992-93 ONSTAGE series is March 26th, when jazz and blues singer Sandra Reaves - Phillips returns by popular demand.

Africa Nite "93"

Saturday February 6, 7:30 pm
SUB CAFETERIA

SELVES

Thirty-five
informal portraits

by Dan Gleason
Jan 25-Feb 12

Faculty Lounge
Edmund Casey Hall
STU