



Lloyd Grill, Liz Widgeson and Cam Gorley in rehearsal for Vanier College's production of Archibald McLeish's J.B.

## Fugard's tale from the cape

By Catherine Clemens

*Sizwe Bansi is Dead* is propagandist theatre without any of the usual trappings.

South Africa's foremost playwright, Athol Fugard, does not turn the theatre into a poorly disguised podium or make any overt political statements. Fugard's approach is quite different — "if you tell a human story the propaganda will take care of itself."

"The Centaur's production of *Sizwe Bansi* now playing at the St. Lawrence Centre, is a humanistic focus on the black South African problem, bringing new understanding to the facts and figures that are encountered daily in the media.

The play is constructed from a series of improvisations with actors John Kani and Winston Ntshona, members of Fugard's South African theatre company 'The Serpent Players.' Fugard presented a photograph to the actors of an odd-looking black man with a toothy smile on his face wearing his best canary-coloured suit.

In the series of Platonic discussions that followed, a question was raised — "Why was he smiling?" John Kani's reply became the focus of the play, "No black man would have a reason to smile unless his reference book was in order." The reference book is the white man's way of keeping an account of the black men by a codification system.

The play opens in a primitive-looking photographer's studio with Styles (the photographer) browsing through the newspaper and making a few personal remarks, such as — "...very first time there's so much trouble and I'm not involved." Stykes (Alton Kumalo) proceeds on, with a "that reminds me" logic, to recount his experiences working at the Ford Motor Plant.

Barely containing his laughter, Syles recalls the day that the "big boss" from the United States came to inspect the plant. Dashing around the stage, Stykes paints coloured safety zones on the floor (with imaginary paint) and goes into detail about a number of last-minute cover-up attempts to impress the soon-to-arrive company. It comes as no surprise that Mr. Ford does little more than stick his face in the door and all the expensive new equipment, so hastily procured, is in vain.

After Styles explains the finer points of portrait photography, such as how to convince the customer that he needs more photos that he does, Sizwe Bansi shuffles timidly into the studio. Sizwe (Errol Slue) wants a photo to send to his wife with an explanation as to why

Sizwe Bansi is now legally dead. Through a flashback, Sizwe reenacts the events that lead to his "death" and also to his new-found identity. In this scene, Alton Kumalo reappears as a new character, Buntu. Buntu is Sizwe's friend who decides for him that he should take the pass book from a dead man that Buntu finds accidentally in the alley while relieving his beer-swollen bladder.

Despite the poignant subject matter, *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* is, in part, a celebration of the undimmed spirit of the black African and this spirit is beautifully transmitted by the actors. The energy that is emitted by these two men is greater than that of most casts ten times their size.

Influenced by Grotowski (a Polish theatre director), Fugard uses his concept of the actor as a completely honest artist, stripped of his "life mask" or inhibitions, who interacts with the audience as a therapist would with a patient.

Fugard elaborates on this concept of the "holy actor": "Theatre is not words on paper, not scenery, lights or makeup, but that magical thing that happens when an actor is there in the flesh, encountering a live spectator. And in the encounter the actor is the key person. It is he who must expose himself in order to make something happen." Unfortunately the St. Lawrence Centre is not suitable for this kind of theatre, being too large to achieve the necessary intimacy.

Failing to provide the intense experience that Fugard sought in the impossible theatre space, the play is reduced to a statement about one poor black man's plight in a remote part of the world. Ironically the play is effective because it is so narrowly focused. By addressing the problems of a specific individual, Fugard touches on many universal human problems.

Fugard has inadvertently become a white spokesman for the blacks even though he never intended that his work be political.

Fugard has been harassed by police, had his passport taken away for three years (with no explanation), and has had to conform to strict censorship that restricts mixed audiences and casts. Fugard complies with these restrictions; he explains his priorities, "... the idea is to get plays performed, not banned."

As Fugard becomes increasingly pessimistic about his homeland's future he is confronted with a dilemma and must decide if playwrighting is a significant act of defiance: "In South Africa they have no sense of theatre as threat".

## Fornicating Aqua Bunnies

# Hare Raising Sex

By Alan Fox

Those who braved TTC and the wilds of Mississauga to attend Erindale College's presentation of Sol Zindel *Neuroendocrine control of Egg-Laying in the Sea Hare Aplysia* were treated to the finest production of this little-known play that this critic has ever seen. Subtitled "Biology Research Seminar," this brilliant work was a triumph due to a stunning performance by Charles Darnay.

Although Zindel's brother Paul became famous with *The Effect of Gamma Rays on Man-In-The-Moon-Marigolds*, Sol is an obscure playwright. His masterpiece, *Aplysia*, has only been performed three times. First was in 1965 in an Open Theatre production under the direction of Peter Feldperson. Next was in 1972 at Brock University, a thoroughly incompetent production, due largely to director Les Lee O'Dell's attempt to transform the one-man show into a choral offering.

The Erindale College performance marks the work's third production, and finally justice has been done to this Theatre-Of-The-Absurd masterpiece.

Playing to a packed house consisting mostly of science students, who displayed unusual signs of being cultured, Darnay carried this one-man show on well-trained shoulders, executing to perfection the difficult role which Zindel names only "The Lecture". Darnay demonstrated an amazing range, one which encompassed brilliant improvisation with an incisive interpretation of dialogue.

The show began with a series of slides accompanied by Darnay's narration. The slides, most of sea hares reproducing, created a subtle erotic mood in the audience, neatly offset by Darnay's monologue, in which he continually diverted their attention from the little beasties' genitals to the endocrine glands, which has been rendered exposed by surgical techniques. The scene was a refreshing twist on Brecht's overused *Verfremdungseffekt*, achieving the perfect balance between intellectual distance and emotional response. The audience actually took notes while craning forward for the perverse thrills offered by the mutilated fornicating 'aqua-bunnies'!

Launching into the body of the work, a two-hour monologue of three sentences, Darnay proved himself a virtuoso performer. Never



Aplysia Nymph.

in the entire period did his voice belie any trace of inflection. His ingenious transformation of monologue into monotone achieved a combination Minimalist-Gregorian effect which easily put the audience into a catatonic state. Truly a brilliant statement on the meaninglessness of language today.

Darnay then finished off his audience with an audience par-



Zindel's next work is "Speculations on The Dodo's Reproductive Cycle," or "How the Dodo Did It."

## The Mad Duellists

By Hugh Westrup

*The Duellists*, a new film from England, traces the history of a mad, violent obsession that accompanies Napoleon's campaigns across Europe.

Lieutenant Feraud, an officer in the emperor's army, is delivered a message by a fellow soldier, Lieutenant D'Hubert. The message, a reprimand from an officer of higher rank, so infuriates Feraud that he challenges its bearer to a duel. Feraud loses the *passage d'armes* but still remains resentful of D'Hubert. Whenever the two men meet in the years that follow, Feraud, a hot-tempered man of war, challenges the gentle, civilized D'Hubert to another duel.

Their intermittent fighting over the next decade is never resolved by death or apology. Feraud's anger grows, and D'Hubert is caught between his rational appraisal of the conflict and a fear of losing face. "Honour above everything, honour is all," states one of the film's characters, to which D'Hubert

offers no challenge.

*The Duellists*, directed by Ridley Scott, is based on a short work by Joseph Conrad. Its cast is an international one. Feraud and D'Hubert are portrayed by American actors Harvey Keitel and Keith Carradine. The supporting players, most of them from Britain, include Albert Finney, Edward Fox and Meg Wynn Owen. Both the Americans and Englishmen retain their native accents yet the mixture of voices is never disturbing. The director has chosen to de-emphasize dialogue and movement. His actors are not so much characters as they are figures on a painter's canvas.

*The Duellists* is a succession of breathtaking images. Inspired by the paintings of the Napoleonic era, director Scott and cinematographer Frank Tidy have dramatized the story's conflicts in their visual compositions. The images recall the transitional artwork of the 18th and 19th century which tried to resolve the classical ideals of reason and order with the romantic ideals of

mystery and emotion. Filmed in this style, *The Duellists* captures the tensions not fully suggested in the performances.

Scott uses the streams, meadows and forests to express the romantic spirit of the era. The film's moods are in nature's backdrops. This is most explicit in the scene in which Feraud and D'Hubert meet in the middle of winter on a corpse-strewn field in Russia. The preceding decade of bloody duelling has left D'Hubert scarred from rapier wounds and abandoned by his mistress. On the snowbound graveyard the two men meet and silently assume their positions. As they face each other, with pistols drawn, the bitter winds wail and descending clouds smother the gray hillsides. It's hell frozen over.

*The Duellists* may silence some of those who have been raving ever since *Barry Lyndon*. Its tale of obsessive hostility, exquisitely photographed, is spellbinding entertainment.