

Walter Borden speaks on learning how to walk

by Moritz Gaede

Walter Borden is a prize-winning poet, playwright and actor who studied acting in New York under Uta Hagen. He has been living in Halifax, his native city, for the last five years, and working for Neptune and Actors Tryworks. His next play, which was written and will be acted entirely by him, is premiering in Studio One of the Dal Arts Center on April 7th.

Recently I spoke to Walter about his new play, "Can't Stop Now - Saints Have Trod", at Juicy Jane's, his favourite Halifax haunt.

Gazette - Is the purpose of your play "Can't Stop Now - Saints

Have Trod" simply to provide a documentation, an illustration of an existing condition, or to influence people and change their attitude?

Walter - Well, I would say that it would have more to do with changing attitudes, although I haven't set out to be the messiah on any kind of a cause...

Gazette - How about the black cause?

Walter - Not even that. See, I'm not speaking on behalf of anybody but me, because I really don't think that you can speak on behalf of anybody except yourself, in the final analysis. If, through what I

say, people get a more in-depth understanding, or at least appreciation, of conditions that might be part of daily black life, that's fine, because what I'm talking about is just that, but I'm not saying what I have to say for the purpose of declamation, it is an illumination, but it is not a historical illumination.

Gazette - But you obviously do point out some of the things which have happened, and certain unjust conditions, like the present situation, and so that is dealing with the black cause in general, and not just with your personal perception of things right now.

Walter - Right. But you see, for

instance, the only historical reference that I make, let's say to the situation that the blacks found themselves in when they first came here and were assigned bits and pieces of land in the surrounding areas, i.e. Preston - the only reference I make to that is in one piece, when I say "Ham's descendants shouted Hallelujah, caught a train and travelled to the warden of the North who counted heads, heaved a sigh, and told them "Go and make potatoes out of rocks."

Gazette - And the rocks were the fields in Preston.

Walter - That's it. And it never comes up again. But I keep hoping that there is a certain repetitiveness throughout this work, that calls one's attention to the emotions that grew out of conditions. And I figure that if I can make anybody in the audience identify with an emotion, then my job is so much easier than asking them to identify with a historical happening which is removed from them. But if, let's say, anguish or pain of a specific nature came out of, say, the people being placed on this land in Preston that wouldn't yield anything except anguish and pain, the people would not be able to identify with that condition, but they do know anguish and pain. So I figure, okay, if we can communicate first on that level, then we can start to deal with the problematic areas that produced the various emotional responses.

Gazette - Yes. Well, one main feeling that I got from reading certain passages of your play was the feeling of hate, the hate of the black slaves towards their white masters, and their master's sons. But that isn't the final message that your play conveys, I mean hate obviously isn't your conclusion to these problems...

Walter - No, and that is why the dramatic presentation is set up so

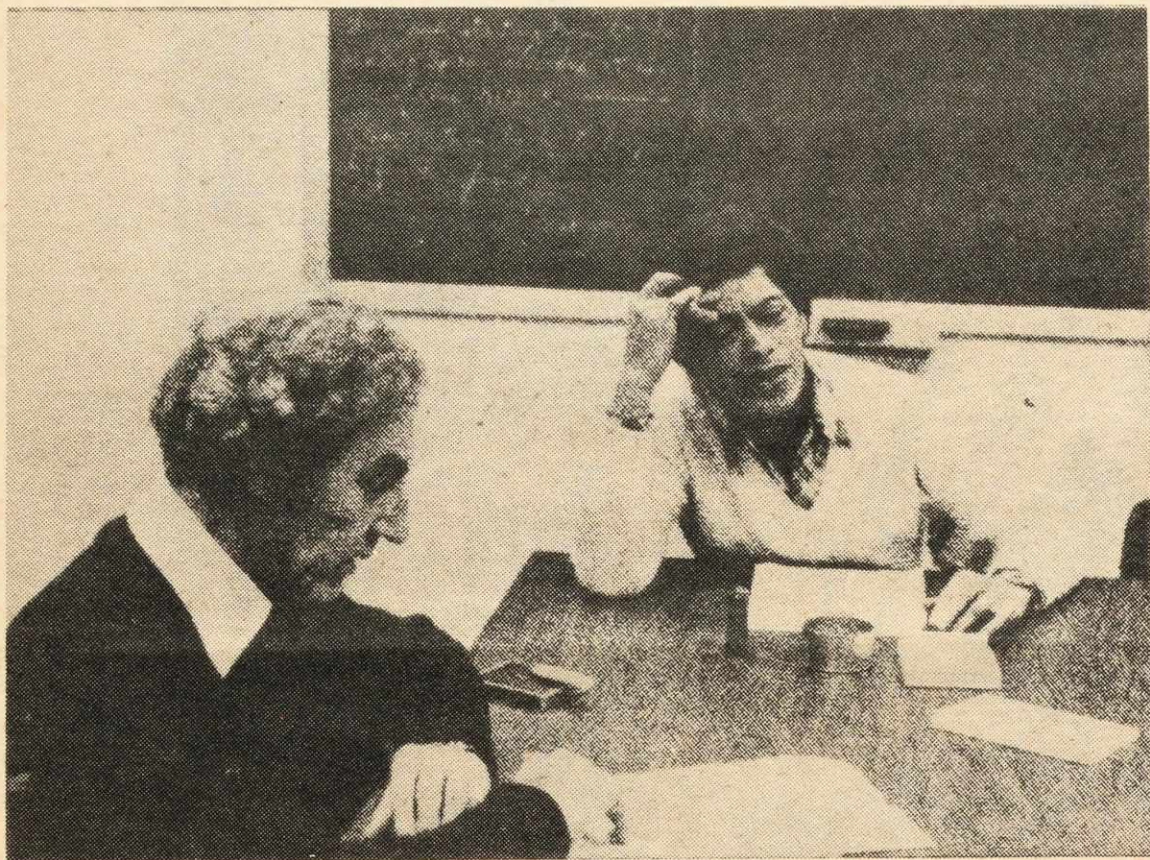
that the person in the audience will get a glimpse into "the mansions of my mind". So you open one door and there's this hatred, and the reason for it. You open this door and you find, say, the pastor preaching what he has to say. You open another door and...what people will have to understand is that there are many mansions in the complex of my mind. That character that conveys so much hatred, or whatever, is the minister of defense. But the minister of the interior takes a different approach.

Gazette - So all the ministers in your play stand for different aspects of your personality?

Walter - Exactly, to show how one balances the other out and who is in control. And I think that is the one thing that we so very frequently don't acknowledge in ourselves. The ability to take in so much, so many sides to life, work them around, and come out with some kind of a result that bespeaks more clearly of development than of retrogression. The same character who can write lines like "I heard it said that Jesus was a faggot with twelve lovers and slept with whores, sounds like their opinion of the average black man who's always thought to start his life with a spoon around his neck" will write "a raindrop tickled a root and caused an oak to laugh so hard it shed an acorn. Which by and by grew up to be another oak, and it established its rapport with still another raindrop. Now that's communication and keen consideration that breeds an understanding and a simple thing called love." Therefore I know that this is not a character who is immersed in what I could only truthfully call gross negativity, and negativity has nothing to do with this piece of work, that I put together.

Gazette - It's clearly very positive in the final conclusion...

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Walter Borden right discusses with director Joseph Rutten.

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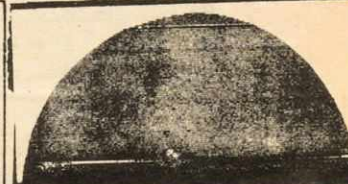
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