

# Arif Hasnain Directs

By GREG CARVER

Arif Hasnain settles comfortably back into his chair at the Grad House on a warm September day. It is just two months since Hasnain came to Halifax to start work for Dalhousie Theatre Productions (D.T.P.) as its new artistic director but he seems calm about the task ahead.

Hasnain is well-qualified for the position at Dal — to say the least. A graduate of the National Theatre School, Hasnain spent the past fourteen years directing plays in both Canada and the United States, and was the Artistic Director of the Manitoba Theatre Centre from 1976 to 1980. In recent years, Hasnain has trained both student and professional actors at various colleges and studios in Ontario. Unlike some theatre directors, he emphasizes the similarities between students and professionals more than their differences.

"You find the same thing in both professional and student situations," Hasnain says. "The director's job is to create a cohesive whole; some people shine, others shine less. You have to deal with the differences." He feels that this is an individual trait, not a fault. "You must take people as they are," he adds.

Hasnain plans to approach the theatre with students first in mind, but also run it on a professional basis. He says Dalhousie Theatre Productions is part theatre department and part school; "Decisions as to who does what have to be coordinated with the training program." As Artistic Director, Hasnain must choose the season according to the needs of the students, especially those in the acting program.

"In professional theatre," he says, "the director chooses a play first, and then tries to cast it. Therefore, casting is always a big problem. However, what makes university theatre unique is that I know who the people are already." Despite the built-in casting advantage, this makes the selection process more difficult since all choices must suit the students.

As well as picking plays, Hasnain will be responsible for hiring the directors and coordinating the technical personnel for the theatre. He is also already planning next year's D.T.P. season. This year, he's busy trying to build on last season's records for both attendance and subscriptions.

Dalhousie's professional approach to student productions is inherent in all areas of its work. The theatre tries to run according to Actors' Equity (union) rules as much as possible. In equity productions, actors rehearse for eight hours a day for three solid weeks. However, students rehearse for four hours a day, and spend additional time studying. For obvious reasons, the university has a certain flexibility regarding



Arif Hasnain may have less co-operative students than himself when he takes over as DTP's artistic director this season. Dal Photo: Todd K. Miller.

equity rules, as the university presents different working circumstances.

Although Hasnain is new to Dalhousie, he did help choose two of this season's four productions: Lanford Wilson's *Fifth of July* and Anton Chekov's *The Three Sisters*. In addition, he is directing the second production, *Rose*, by Andrew Davies. Rounding out the season is Oliver Goldsmith's classic comedy, *She Stoops to Conquer* in the second term.

"At one point, I was going to direct *Fifth of July*," Hasnain said of D.T.P.'s first production. "It relates to people who have come through the sixties and are getting ready for the new era.

Fundamentally, this happens to all of us," he adds. "We relate to something in the past; something precious, and we feel a bit lost in the future." *Fifth of July* runs October 16-20 in Studio One, and will be directed by Richard Hilger.

Although Hasnain says he'd like to direct any play this season, he says he's especially happy about doing *Rose*. *Rose* is a very interesting piece of work," he says. "It is an adult play about adult problems and it touches me in terms of its sheer humanity and sense of humour."

The production is a witty look at a woman in modern society. *Rose* will be presented in Sir

James Dunn Theatre from November 27 - December 1 and is a special presentation in honour of the Dalhousie Women's Centenary.

Chekov's *The Three Sisters*, to be presented in Studio One from February 5-9, promises to be such an approach. Directed by Alan Andrews, this production will be a premiere of a new adaptation presented in a "unique" setting.

"Very rarely do you see Chekov presented in a non-proscenium fashion," says Hasnain, "because that's how it's always done. This production will use space in a unique manner to bring the play to life with less formality."

"Some directors will present realism while others will interpret a play differently, depending on both the play and his feelings," says Hasnain. Shakespeare has continued to grow on us, and people find different ways to express him. This makes theatre a very exciting and individual art form.

"Most of our impressions of Shakespeare come from the 19th century, not from the actual time the plays were written. Concepts of style, if true artistic statements, must relate to where we are now. That's how art changes."

Hasnain says the university is more likely to use different approaches than a professional theatre, since a broad range of styles and forms must be covered for the students' education. While innovation is encouraged, Hasnain believes that students need solid grounding in well-made pieces before going on to newer or more innovative ones. "Most training sessions attempt to give the student as much solid fare as possible," he says.

As for Dal Theatre's selection process, Hasnain says it is wide open territory. However, budget restraints make it difficult to present certain larger productions such as musicals, especially with Dal Theatre's recent budget shortfall.

Dalhousie is totally university funded; the budget is close to a freeze situation and last year the theatre had a deficit. This year, the department wants to improve the situation.

"Basically, the university gives us money for the department, and we must then rely on money from the box office," says Hasnain.

As well as having a new artistic director, Dal Theatre has experienced other departmental changes. Kelly Henderek, from Edmonton, has joined the acting staff and will be coaching voice, text, and first year acting.

Hasnain's term at Dalhousie will be for three years. In that time, he hopes to take Dal Theatre Productions, now in their third year, further in their development. "I would like to see a stronger training program for the acting students, and an increase in public awareness," he says.

*Fifth of July* is currently in rehearsal. "The rehearsals are going very well," says Hasnain. "all of the people are excited, and it looks like it will be a terrific opener for this season." □

## Top Ten Videos

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### 4. *The Riddle*—Nik Kershaw

I think this is the best adaptation of a video to its title. The video is filmed inside a corridor shaped in the form of a question mark. Inside it is filled with jokes, games, fables, nursery rhymes, mysteries and even a joker. It also includes a whirlpool in the floor and a wall mirror made out of water. It's very carefully thought out, well planned and demonstrates the idea of the riddle with a great deal of precision.

### 5. *Criminal Mind*—Gowan

This begins with a boy reading a comic book about a criminal. The story is told in such a way as the comic book figure comes to life in the form of both a cartoon character and as Gowan. There is innovative use of full size posters as well as the use of a futuristic "truth" machine. The winning point of the video comes from following the song's lyrics very effectively in showing that Gowan (the criminal) really does have a "criminal mind".

### 6. *You Might Think*—The Cars

This video has excellent use of computer graphics and uses them in a very humorous and entertaining way. Examples are having a submarine in a bathtub, having the lead singer "Rik", in a lipstick tube and a King Kong size "Rik" dropping a girl instead of letting himself fall. The winning point of the video, however, is a computer generated horsefly with Rik's face on it. This has both originality and humour at the same time, a rare commodity to find.

### 7. *Do You Really Want To Hurt Me*—Culture Club

I feel this video is innovative because it shows how the arrival of something different is rejected by people because they don't understand it. In the video it shows that Boy George shocks the establishment whether located by a pool or in a courtroom. Another part which sets the video apart is Boy George's androgenous look. This was the first mass media look at a style which has invaded high fashion and has now begun to enter into the common fashion look.

### 8. *Thriller*—Michael Jackson

Special effects are what make this video stand above the others. The graveyard scene and Michael's transformation into a werewolf are examples of the precision that went into making the video. As well, other details help complete the video. The most important is Vincent Price's narrative, creating a sense of approaching doom and anxiety.

### 9. *Money For Nothing* (uncut version)—Dire Straits

Computer imagery highlights this video. This has two computer generated workmen singing the song and in fact living it intercut with a Dire Straits stage performance. They sing about how they work and sweat all day while these people on MTV get millions of dollars for getting as much as "... a blister on his little finger ...". The computer imagery, includes a computer generated man watching MTV. His face suddenly goes blank and he is drawn into the TV set. The computer also places the band playing inside a microwave oven. The video shows the resentment people have towards musicians they feel have become unwarrantably famous.

### 10. *Close To The Edit*—Art of Noise

This video stands above other videos because of its uniqueness. It is a daring and innovative video that doesn't seem afraid of doing anything; attacking a piano with a chainsaw, to tempting a dog with a sausage. The editing and presentation of the video are also excellent and really bring the video's interesting action together. □