

Latitude's Ghosts are more than mere theatre

Theatre review by Beno John

Latitude 53's latest production, *Ghost Story* is an intriguing, boldly innovative piece which sets out to explore the interface between theatre and art, between performance and audience response and between dramatic time and 'real time.' In fact, the pioneering nature of this very conceptual production quite often harms even the players. *Ghost Story* sets off so many reverberations which designer Brian Donnelly and actor David Sereda could have maximized but chose not to. This was no doubt a display of opening night nerve.

Ghost Story is a very space conscious piece: the audience is seated in two semi-circles facing each other. The "action" originates from the center, but radiates outwards in a circular or spiral fashion and at times encircles the audience. As well, the action involves the construction of an enclosed space in the center of the floor, a construction that begins with the deliberate demarcation of a circular boundary (achieved by one of the players arranging newspapers in a circle) which effectively defines the exterior (the audience outside the circle) and the interior (the inside where the players construct the enclosed structure).

The structure is constructed out of scaffolding and translucent plastic sheets by master builder, David Sereda, with a deliberation and intensity which gives the piece much of its tempo. The effect is rather successful; we are treated to mobile sculpture in the making. The structure is assembled in the shape of a cross and is constructed symmetrically, a symmetry that is counterpointed by two television cameras and two monitors placed opposite each other, facing the audience.

While Sereda builds, Donnelly "tracks" the action with the appropriate camera. When the camera isn't involved in the action as is often the case when Donnelly is helping Sereda with the assembly of the structure—the camera is turned on the audience. But the image recorded on the monitor isn't one's own but always of the audience on the opposite side. The result: "real time" during which the members of the audience yawn, scratch their heads and simply puzzle over what's happening in front of them. This visual

record is supplemented by two slide projectors mounted on opposite corners of the ceiling which display a series of slides showing the interior of an old house on one projector, and a series of slides showing the exterior of the Latitude 53 building, on the other. And if this isn't enough, Donnelly, in between his bits on camera, records the action and the audience with a 35mm camera as well as a polaroid camera whose instant image is *once more* photographed by the television camera. Complete this with two soundtracks—one of ordinary traffic and pedestrian sounds, the other a muffled, static filled, patter of a local radio station—and you have a rather complete multi-media presentation.

The result of this assortment of recording technology surrounding the construction of the central structure is interesting; the act of building is recorded, and recorded again. The "action" sets off a series of responses which ripple and echo through each medium. The trouble is that Sereda and Donnelly don't take advantage of the beautiful situation they have created. There are far too many times when the cameras are pointed at insignificant things and places; an oversight that destroys the momentum of the piece. Even more disastrous are the actions of the players which are underplayed and somewhat muffled by the objects they use.

There is so much visual symmetry in the way space is arranged that the piece almost demands that the motions of the players be more choreographed. When you decide to bound the working space with two concentric circles then it is imperative that your motion is strongly affected by it—something that Sereda took advantage of only once, when before the end of the piece he made a complete circuit of the structure he

finished making. The effect of that simple motion was overwhelming; it infused the static plastic and steel sculpture with a life and tension that knocked you back on your seat. There should have been many more moments like that in *Ghost Story*.

Ghost Story has all the makings of a very kinetic piece simply in the way it is arranged whether you view it as drama, sculpture or visual art. The thing is to isolate those elements within the present structure of the production and accentuate them. For instance, the camera can tape a particular aspect of the structure being built, then it can be played back at another point in the assembly. The sound track should be louder and a little more varied; a simple modification that would greatly add to the texture of the piece.

But these are stylistic complaints which the audience shared in one respect or another and were thrown at the actors after the show. Donnelly and Sereda encouraged audience response after the show, which is a rare and valuable thing, and this post-show evaluation could be considered part of the act as well. And since a large part of *Ghost Story* is experimental and improvisational, you know for a fact that your opinions will have an effect on will shape future performances. It's awfully close to being able to yell and hoot your approval at a good jazz band jamming it up, even if it's a bad night and the performers are fucking up their solos: you *know* they're good but they have to be prodded a bit.

One thing for certain though, Donnelly and Sereda have opened up a class act. Efforts like this show us what theatre *can* be and that it can be *alive*, invigorating and intellectually stimulating. For three bucks *Ghost Story* isn't a bad deal at all—catch it if you can.

Shumka Dancers

Shumka is celebrating their twentieth anniversary performing a continental tour this spring.

Shumka is an Edmonton Ukrainian dancing group dedicated to "the preservation, development and advancement of the Ukrainian culture as a part of Canadian heritage." Shumka is composed of sixty members from several different ethnic backgrounds, most of them Ukrainian. Teachers, students, nurses, businessmen and women devote several nights a week to practice as a group. Their format combines storytelling through dance and the old traditional folk steps, thus enabling the audience to enjoy the familiar steps in a refreshingly new perspective.

The group has performed in Montreal during Expo 67, at Spokane's 1974 World's Fair, for the Canadian Embassy in Tokyo, Japan, at Canada Day celebrations in Ottawa, and even for Queen Elizabeth's command performance in Edmonton in 1978.

To celebrate their twentieth season, Shumka will be performing in Detroit, Hamilton, Winnipeg, Saskatoon, and Calgary. Their Edmonton performances will be at the Jubilee Auditorium on March 1, 2 and 3. Tickets are available from Mike's Ticket Office.



Why is this man smiling? It could be because he will be appearing in SUB Theatre next Tuesday evening, February 27. The gent's name is Paul Hann, often referred to as the Cockney Cowboy. Hann became known around the time of his first album, "A Fine, White Thread," which was highlighted by the song "Queen of the May," (you remember: "You've come a long way, baby, since you were

the Queen of the May..."). Since that time, Hann has released two albums on Stony Plain Records, and his reputation as a fine singer, songwriter and musician has grown steadily.

Tickets for Hann's concert are available at the HUB Box Office. The program is a presentation of Yardbird Productions.

Arts quiz

By Gary McGowan

Hits of the Sixties

(Answers on page 11)

- Which one of the following was not in the original Animals? (a) Chas Chandler (b) Alan Price (c) Hilton Valentine (d) Dean Rusk.
- Now with the Atlanta Rhythm Section, who was the drummer for the Candyman, the group who backed Roy Orbison on "Pretty Woman"? (a) George Hees (b) Robert Nix (c) Ringo Starr (d) Dave Mattacks
- Which macho California rock star once auditioned for the Monkees and was rejected because of his bad teeth? (a) Stephen Stills (b) Marty Balin (c) Jim Morrison (d) Jerry Brown.
- What was the single song that was released from the ill-fated collaboration between Brian Wilson and Van Dyke Parks for the Beach Boys' never-released *Smile*? (a) "Caroline, No" (b) "Good Vibrations" (c) "Heroes and Villains" (d) "Wouldn't It Be Nice?"
- Who did The Who open for on their first appearance in Edmonton? (a) Cream (b) Herman's Hermits (c) The 49th Parallel (d) The Electric Prunes

- Who first had a hit with "The Letter" in 1967? (a) The Box Tops (b) Moby Grape (c) The Rascals (d) The Electric Prunes
- Which Beatle song featured one of the first uses of feedback? (a) "Hey Bulldog" (b) "Matchbox" (c) "(You Know My Name) Look Up My Number" (d) "I Feel Fine"
- Only one original Byrd played on "Mr. Tambourine Man" in 1965. What was his name? (a) Robert Zimmerman (b) Graham Nash (c) Jim McGuinn (d) Gram Parsons
- What was the name of the Kinks' first rock opera? (a) *Mass In F Minor* (b) *Surfin' Safari* (c) *After Bathing at Baxter's* (d) *Arthur or the Decline and Fall of the British Empire*
- What group did Jimi Hendrix play in before becoming a solo star? (a) The Isley Brothers (b) Delaney and Bonnie and Friends (c) The Rolling Stones (d) Herman's Hermits

