

# "Live" Tolkien trilogy at Cohn

by Scott Neily

*Three Rings for the Elven-kings  
under the sky,  
Seven for the Dwarf-lords in  
their halls of stone,  
Nine for Mortal Men doomed to  
die,  
One for the Dark Lord on his  
dark throne  
In the land of Mordor where  
the shadows lie.*

*One Ring to rule them all, One  
Ring to find them,  
One Ring to bring them all and  
in the darkness bind them  
In the Land of Mordor where  
the shadows lie.*

And so began Theatre Sans Fil's dramatic production of J.R.R. Tolkien's immensely popular fantasy trilogy, **The Lord of the Rings**. The Montreal-based theatre company ran the spectac-

ular play last Thursday and Friday at the Rebecca Cohn, drawing near capacity crowds on both nights. The audience response was highly enthusiastic ... and no wonder. The production was lavish, the special effects were outstanding and the two hour plus rendition of the much venerated work was nothing short of brilliant. And the reason for such brilliant praise? Simple. The extraordinary combination of puppets and live actors on stage.

Ever since Sesame Street, the use of puppets or marionettes in popular mediums has become a trendy and cheap method of interacting fantastic creatures with live actors. Indeed, the Muppet Show and the movie **The Empire Strikes Back** proved that when innovative technology was mated with traditional puppet and

marionette techniques, characters could be created that would have as much impact on a viewer as a human actor would. Theatre Sans Fil, in a daring move long before either the Muppet Show or **The Empire Strikes Back** appeared, brought puppeteering into the demanding world of contemporary theatre.

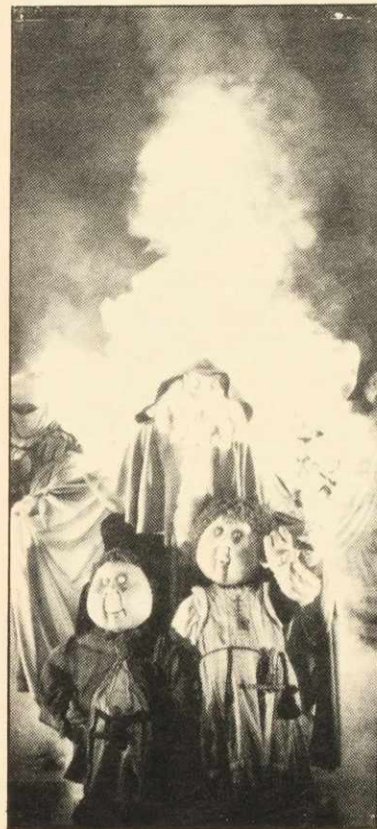
Their innovation proved to be a brilliant step forward. Their productions of such plays as **Blue Sky Takes a Wife**, **The White Raven**, **The Hobbit** (another Tolkien story), and **Sweet Sorrows** have brought them critical international recognition and eventually led to their first performance of **The Lord of the Rings** in 1985.

Tolkien's highly praised novels have been tremendously popular with both children and adults since first being published in the mid-Fifties. The lengthy

cult to translate into a visual medium. Noted American animator Ralph Bakshi attempted to do so with his animated (and not too successful) film version in 1978.

The key to Theatre Sans Fil's success lies in the "live" action story telling. All the voices in the production were prerecorded and the puppets were manipulated by black-clothed actors, according to the dialogue at the time. The character of Sam acted as host and narrator for the show, as well as a participant, thus allowing for difficult action sequences and tedious segments to be skimmed via concise narration. Therefore, the important scenes were emphasized and the essence of the original story was undiminished. The 35,000-plus hours of preparation that went into the play were obviously well spent and it added up to a well done tale.

As a onetime Tolkien zealot, my only complaint was that the elves looked a little too ethereal and alien when compared to detailed 'humanity' of the other characters. Even the evil orcs were better portrayed than the elves. However, when compared to the richness of the whole show, this one flaw is greatly overshadowed.



**Puppets: Innovative touch.**

story, set in a fantasy world composed of mythical races, mighty wizards and evil creatures, is diffi-

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## MPBN comes to Halifax to hawk hi-kwality TV

by Amber-Leigh Golding

The Maine Public Broadcasting Network went on the road late in September for a series of engagements throughout the Maritimes, culminating in the Halifax spectacle on the 29th.

Public broadcasting has encountered an increasing amount of competition in recent years from pay television. If affiliates like MPBN are to thrive, aggressive public relations stunts such as the gathering Halifax will become crucial.

By all accounts, the Canadian tour, hosted by Barbara Beers, Mary Lou Colbath and the ever-popular Bernie Roscetti, was highly successful. This was certainly borne out at the Halifax Sheraton, where a packed audience attended to gain a sneak preview of the programming they could look forward to in the coming year. This is a special time for MPBN, as 1988 marks the television station's 25th year on the air. Sailing in to their silver anniversary, the MPBN has become increasingly aware of the importance this region holds in their annual operating budget. 40 per cent of money pledged during their fundraising activities comes from Maritime viewers. Currently, well over five thousand Atlantic Canadians are official Public Television members. No wonder MPBN went to so much

trouble to pay us a call.

Absent from the evening were the guilt-trip tactics for support for which Public Television is so infamous. Instead, the evening sported a soft-sell approach; Bernie and his friends used the opportunity to highlight the catchy "We're Family" slogan and took the time to chat up potential contributors for the December pledge campaign.

Not everyone was completely satisfied with the evening. Some members of the audience began leaving during the question-and-answer period following the video presentations, presumably because conversation drifted too often away from programming into the convoluted — and boring — realm of video transmission.

"I really appreciated what MPBN was doing, coming down to talk to us about their station," said Dalhousie student Cigana Raven, "but I think it was bad taste for certain high-tech goof-balls in the audience to attempt to dominate the proceedings. It seems to me the purpose of the presentation was to discuss shows, not the science of television."

Raven added that the evening was a "great success". Fellow student Richard Fitters agreed. "Sitting in a hotel ballroom with a cup of coffee and a piece of cake chatting about the McNeil-Lehrer News Hour really turns me on."