

Playwright's Cabaret delivers

the box

BY DANIEL CLARK

HAD the undeniable pleasure last Saturday night, at the David MacK, Murray Studio, to witness the future of stage and screen practice their newly-learned craft.

The Playwright's Cabaret is an exposition of sixteen short plays written by students in the playwriting class of the Dalhousie Theatre Department. The plays are directed and performed by members of the performance class and departmental volunteers; the experience of the students ranges from first to fourth year.

The Cabaret is theatre in its purest form. The shows are all technically simple. The stage rarely has more than a couch or a table and chairs. The costumes, with the exception of Margaret MacDonald's play, are items from the actors' closets.

The focus of the Cabaret is not to produce large and glitzy performances, but to allow the writers to see them performed and to learn from the production. Every writer has to do a rewrite of their play after the Cabaret to incorporate into it what they've observed.

The first play I saw was a "Tarantino"-esque collage by Matt Kutas called *Is Ted Coming To Dinner* that is based around the eclectic combination of two couples. One is overcoming an affair had with the barber — "The fucking

PLAYWRIGHT'S CABARET: WEEK 2

Doors Open at 7:30 p.m./ Performances at 8 p.m.

THURSDAY MARCH 14

Dead People
Collage of Events
Our Dried Voices
Another Jazz Night
Goodnight Ladies
What's in a Package

FRIDAY MARCH 15

Our Dried Voices
Dead People
Say Goodnight, Gracie
Another Jazz Night
Collage of Events
Untitled (Aaron)

SATURDAY MARCH 16

Untitled (Aaron)
Say Goodnight, Gracie
Goodnight Ladies
Another Jazz Night
Collage of Events
What's in a Package

barber!" The other, a gay couple, are dancing between having lamb for dinner and being in touch with their feelings. To be honest, this one kept me up most of the night.

Untitled by Erika Hennebury is a deliciously sarcastic combination of *Romeo and Juliet* and *Macbeth*. It asks the question, "What if, when Romeo and Juliet

committed suicide, the heaven they go to is sexually segregated and staffed by the three witches from *Macbeth*." Hats off to Mike LeBlanc who plays the testosterone-packed and romantically inept Romeo.

Peter Saunders' *Sound Effects* is just totally fucked up. It's a movie within a play in a Hamlet-like question of self. The movie is a B-level production where a cross-eyed, psychopathic, seventies-reject, disco killer stalks a transvestite possessed by fleas which move him/her when he/she is dead. The play is even weirder...I never stopped laughing.

If there is a theme to the Cabaret plays, it seems to be in the characters' questioning of themselves. This is best illustrated in *The Ghoul* by Anna Purcell. Woody Allen meets Robinson Crusoe in this psychodrama — then it gets really unconventional. Great performances all around in this one.

Only Mad Dogs and Englishmen... would not laugh their asses off at this play. Ben Chaisson and Sue Shawyer (between them, they are in 25% of the Cabaret shows) are hilarious. Ben is the senile, deaf priest, while Sue plays an ignored and VERY horny housewife. Great dialogue and really great chemistry here!

The final show on Saturday night was *The Bells*, one of the most anticipated shows of the evening. Author Margaret

MacDonald has written a play around the story of the Brönte sisters. It is an excellent show and MacDonald does an excellent job in manipulating the period dialogue.

The fact that these plays are works-in-progress does not, in any way, hinder the performances. Each actor in every play clearly gives their all. No one takes this experience lightly. I saw performances to rival those of *The Good Woman of Setzuan*, one of the major theatre department productions.

This is theatre like you've never experienced it before. There is a far more relaxed atmosphere than in the more formal productions. The actors will sit in the audience when their play isn't on, as will the directors. You are encouraged to go up to the play's writer and tell them what you think. There are tables around the stage, and drinks are served from a cash bar. No one cares if you get stinking drunk, because in doing so you are simply adding to the ambience. There is no fee to attend the Cabaret, but if you want to get slammed, then I suggest you bring your wallet.

It was a wonderful evening and all the writers are to be congratulated. We have to remember that David Mamet wasn't always a Pulitzer Prize-winner, and Quentin Tarantino wrote his first screenplay while working at a video store. I have no doubt that these writers are easily of that calibre.

This Saturday night the Grawood will host the **First Annual Dalhousie AIDS Benefit Concert** from 7 p.m. to 1 a.m. Proceeds from the concert will go to the Nova Scotia Aids Coalition Health Care Fund, which gives support to those living with HIV or AIDS. The lineup includes improvisational funksters P.F. Station, At Ease, Lime Rickey, and Ray Teddaver. Cover is \$2 at the door and donations will be taken during the evening. All are welcome.

American sculpture of the later 20th century is featured in the final instalment of the *Masters of Modern Sculpture* series, *Part Three: The New World*. The film, part of the Dalhousie Art Gallery's Modern Sculpture and Painting screenings, is showing Wednesday at 12:30 p.m. and 8 p.m. Donations are accepted but there is no admission fee.

The Holiday Inn Select Commons Room will be the place to be in the cool this Friday as some of today's "greatest contemporary jazz artists" gather to perform and collaborate on a CBC recording. *A Collection of Jazz Masters* will include performances by: New York piano virtuoso Cyrus Chesnut; London, England's trumpeting sensation Kenny Wheeler; St. F.X. faculty Greg Carter (saxophone); Gene Smith (trombone); Jeri Brown (vocals); bassist Dan Sutherland; and, master percussionist Jerry Granelli of Halifax. Tickets are \$20 general and \$15 for JazzEast members/seniors/students. The performance starts at 8 p.m. with tickets available by calling 492-2225.

The Atlantic Film Festival and Symphony Nova Scotia are presenting a unique cinematic event this coming Tuesday at the Rebecca Cohn Auditorium of the Dal Arts Centre. The silent film version of *The Phantom of the Opera* will be screened with orchestral accompaniment by Symphony Nova Scotia. Tickets are \$18 seniors/students and \$29.50 regular. Call 494-3820 for more info and tickets.

The Caribbean Students Societies of Dal, SMU, and The Mount are holding *Caribanza '96* in the McInnes Room of the Dalhousie SUB. A fun evening of Caribbean culture, *Caribanza* includes a buffet dinner of **delicious Caribbean dishes**, a cultural show, and a dance afterwards. Tickets are \$18 at the door and \$15 in advance at the Dal SUB, SMU, and Mount St. Vincent University.

Pop-happy Halifax band **Plumtree**, fresh from a two week tour of southern Ontario, are having a CD release party tonight at the Birdland. Veterans of the Halifax scene, the foursome (with new bassist Catriona Sturton) will be promoting their first full-length album, *Mass Teen Fainting*. The show starts at 10 p.m. with openers State Champs and DJ Maestro Moxie. "Wouldn't it be scary to have a dog gone cra-zee..."

Emma Thompson: handsome young lad

BY JAMES WORRALL

MISTAKEN for a boy, Dora Carrington has attracted the attention of homosexual writer Lytton Strachey (Jonathan Pryce). Although Carrington, a young painter in World War I England, is repulsed by Strachey at first, the two soon develop a friendship. Slowly, she falls in love with him. Emma Thompson's Dora is the title character of *Carrington*, playing this week at Wormwoods.

Strachey and Carrington set up house together, and although finances are a problem, there is no suggestion that anyone go to work. They write and paint, and Carrington has a succession of lovers: Ralph Partridge (Steve Waddington), whom she marries; his best friend Gerald Brenan (Samuel West); and, a good looking yachtsman, Beacus Penrose (Jeremy Northam). For Carrington, though, love has

"nothing romantic about it" — she and Lytton retain their peculiar liaison throughout.

Carrington is based on Michael Holroyd's biography *Lytton Strachey*. It tells the real stories of Strachey and Carrington, members of the infamous "Bloomsbury group," who challenged societal norms in the early part of this century. The film, directed by Christopher Hampton, is a quiet love story and, despite its intellectual mood, it develops a unique sensuality. Pryce is brilliant as Lytton, and his wry wit sets the dialogue alight. In one great scene at a military tribunal, Lytton is protesting his conscription to fight in the First World War: he speaks of revolution while somehow remaining a paragon of etiquette. *Carrington* captures that singularly English combination of emotion and restraint.

Carrington is the kind of movie you love in retrospect — it's hard to describe what makes it good. It



Jonathan Pryce and Emma Thompson in *Carrington*

MOVIE

Carrington

Starring Emma Thompson and Jonathan Pryce

is certainly far from typical. It is tragic, but never overdone, and it remains witty and cerebral throughout. The excellent cinematography and sombre music evoke a romantic side. If Hollywood did not keep making the same movies again and again, we might see

more films like this one. If you need action and laughs through every scene, then this film might not be for you. However, if you like dialogue-heavy, well-acted, and visually-interesting British dramas, then check out *Carrington*.

Carrington is playing at Wormwoods, opposite *Angels and Insects*, starting Friday. Show times alternate between 7 p.m. on the odd-numbered days and 9 p.m. on the even-numbered days.

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