

Rising tide in Halifax: Nfld theatre

by Stan Beeler

I sat near the altar with a quietly reverent expression on my face and waited as the whispering died and the lights dimmed. Then a seedy-looking man in an ugly jacket and yellow pants came forward. He sang a few bars of a song as he strutted in a circle around the stage and then walked over to the bar and had a short sip of his drink.

The Saint Mary's University Art Gallery presented the Rising Tide Theatre Company on Wednesday, February 11th as a part of their Evening with Art series. The Saint Mary's Theatre Auditorium was at one time a church and the illusion of a house of worship is still there. (I presume that the deity is now Dionysis). The seedy-looking man on the stage was David Ross in his role as the title character (in fact the only character) in *The Romeo Kuchmir Story*. The play was written by Ken Smedley and David Ross and was taken from the novel, *Night Desk* by George Ryga. Kuchmir (I hesitate to call him Romeo) is a wrestler turned promoter who has been asked to take the place of a comic in a somewhat rundown tavern cum nightclub.

As soon as he hits the stage he starts hustling. He proposes to turn the place into a wrestling ring and cut all of the spectators in on a piece of

the action. When the bar owner protests he begins to relate short segments of his life history. From these we can gather that he is a bit more sensitive than his appearance leads one to believe. He punctuates his revealing stories of his past successes and failures with the shout "Bulba" (his wrestling nom de guerre). He flexes his arms and hops forward, his arms spread as if to grapple with an opponent. While doing this he grins as if to say, "So, I may be a fool but that is what you paid to see; isn't it?"

He talks of the role that strong men like himself have in the modern world. He says that at one time a hundred of them could have taken the world over, but now with guns and machines they wouldn't have a chance. Wrestling clowns seems to be the only role left for them. Kuchmir mocks his own son because he reads thick books on war, although he is a physical weakling. (Look out folks, I think that is a shot at us university types.)

On the whole, the play is an expression of the role of the performer in society. This is not all that surprising considering that an actor collaborated on the writing. Think of all the novels that have a writer as the main character. Romeo appears to be the sort of man who has the traditional "carny" attitude of "anything to please the marks." The im-

age that he presents to the public is something less than himself.

The second play that the Newfoundland-based company presented was *Terese's Creed*, concerning the life of a widowed woman in a small outport on their native island. Again we have a one person show with Donna Butt in the role of the aging, poor Terese, a woman who lives only for her eight children. She tells us in a thick dialect of her conception of and adjustment to the changes that have come about during her lifetime.

She places her own generation between the resignation of the previous one, which ascribed all misfortune to God's will, and the freedom that her children enjoy. "We never had no choice," she says a shade regretfully, as she worries aloud about the possibility of her daughter becoming pregnant. One gets the impression that she would not consider it such a disaster because she fears the time when her children will grow up and leave her. An illegitimate child would give her a reason to go on living.

Terese is a woman who has very few illusions about herself and the world around her. She resents the fact that she has depended upon welfare since her husband died and she hopes that she will win enough money at Bingo to become independent. However, she recognizes this

as a symptom of the modern desire to get something for nothing and reprove herself for it.

A photograph on the wall is the only indication of her husband Pat. He is represented to us by Terese as a man who has resented deeply the bonds that poverty had forged for himself and his fellow fishermen. She tells of his outraged reaction to the local priest who advised resignation in the case of a friend who had died at sea. Pat eventually dies at sea under much the same circumstances, i.e. taking "unnecessary" risks. The play ends with Terese searching for the strength to go on alone.

I found that both plays were excellently conceived and presented and worked well within the inherent limitations of the one-person-show. First and foremost, there is little possibility of action on the stage. In *The Romeo Kuchmir Story* all that is presented is a man strutting back and forth and upon occasion taking a drink. *Terese's Creed* was slightly more involving; here we have the spectacle of a middle-aged woman doing her laundry. The true action of this sort of play must be related to us rather than presented as action. Theater has a long

tradition of sections of the action being presented only as report, usually by a messenger. But in this sort of play (one-person) the playwright is limited by the length of time that a single actor can hold the attention of the audience by telling stories. The format is almost that of a book being read aloud. The plots of pieces of this sort tend to be a series of anecdotes connected only by being events in the life of the character presented. Construction of this sort does not lend itself to the building of tension or conclusive endings. The one-person show tends, therefore, to be a character study. Both of the plays presented by the Rising Tide Theatre succeed remarkably well at this. *Terese's Creed* also manages to reflect upon some of the social problems of our changing world. To my mind this makes it the artistically superior of the two.

If this group should ever return to Halifax, I would highly recommend attending their performance. They manage to be smoothly professional while avoiding the tendency towards excessive concentration upon spectacle that seems to plague Neptune Theatre. Theatre is alive and living in Newfoundland.

A retrospective : The Monkees

by Ian Holloway

The Monkees have to be one of the most maligned of all the pop groups of the 1960s. They are the standard when speaking of "manufactured" pop stars, much in the same way as Fabian is the standard for the 1950s. They are primarily seen as cheap imitations of the Beatles, with no musical talent whatsoever, and whose popularity rested solely on physical attributes.

In spite of all their shortcomings, the Monkees *did* make some good music. Monkee music was *fun* music. And unlike other manufactured groups (The Archies, The Partridge Family, etc.), the Monkees did learn to play and write their own music. Indeed, on their third album, they wrote half of the songs — more than Elvis ever did.

More Of The Monkees was their second album. They were at the height of their popularity: their TV show was top rated, they had just begun a wildly successful concert tour, and adolescent girls were fainting in droves at the sight of their heroes.

Like the Beatles, each of the Monkees had a certain "personality" and sang songs which reflected this. Michael Nesmith was the countrified Monkee, Mickey Dolenz was the rocker, Davey Jones was the hearthrob, and Peter Tork (who, incidentally, now

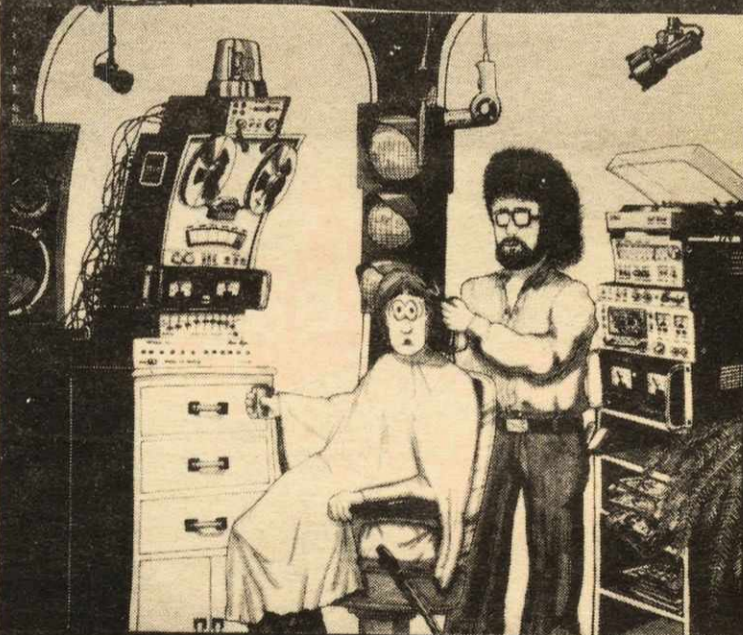


teaches philosophy) was the joker. Most of the songs on this album were written to be popular to little girls, but some (notably "She" and "Mary, Mary") have pretty darn tight guitar arrangements. Of particular note is the classic "(I'm not your) Steppin' Stone," which has been covered by everyone from Jimi Hendrix to the Sex Pistols. Another song on the album which has recently been re-recorded is "I'm A Believer" (done by Bram Tchaikowsky).

And if the Monkees didn't

write all of their songs, they could hardly have assembled a better set of composers than they did for this album: Neil Diamond, Neil Sedaka, and Gerry Coffin and Carole King, to name a few, penned songs for this album.

The Monkees may not have been the greatest musical geniuses in the pop world. Indeed, they may have been quite mediocre. Yet, in spite of all this, they made a lot of extremely listenable and danceable music which even today can be appreciated.



Winter Hours

Mon.-Thurs. 10 a.m.-8 p.m.
 Friday 10 a.m.-10 p.m.
 Saturday 10 a.m.-7 p.m.

Men \$10 Women \$14

NO APPOINTMENTS