

Barometer Rising at Neptune goes

B O O O M

by Ellen Reynolds

Not many people can remember Halifax as far back as Dec. 6, 1917, but most of us have read or been told about the devastating Halifax Explosion. For the seventieth anniversary of the explosion, Neptune Theatre is presenting *Barometer Rising*,

adapted for the stage by artistic director Richard Ouzounian from Hugh MacLennan's celebrated novel.

The collision of two ships in the Halifax Harbour — the Belgian steamer Imo and the French steamer Mont Blanc, loaded with TNT — started a fire on the

Mont Blanc which continued in towards the pier where crowds were gathering to see the spectacular sight. It was 18 minutes after the collision that the tremendous explosion occurred, killing approximately 2000, injuring 9000, and levelling most of the city.

Barometer Rising followed the lives of several people leading up to the explosion. Third-person narration provided story background and helped solve the problem of presenting an entire novel in the space of two hours. The play began with Neil MacRae returning from the war overseas to a cold and unwelcoming Halifax. Neil had been reported missing, presumed dead, in France after his unethical commander (and uncle), Colonel Geoffrey Wain, removed him from duty for disobeying an impossible order.

Wain was back in Halifax and Neil had to clear his name before showing his face and returning to Penny, his cousin and betrothed. Meanwhile, another soldier and friend of Penny's, Dr. Angus Murray, had fallen in love with Penny and offered to marry her. This pleased Wain to no end, since he hated his nephew and never approved of Neil's interest in his daughter Penny.

The complexities of MacLennan's novel are well-presented by the actors, especially the convincing characterizations of Wain, Penny, and Angus by David Renton, Carol Sinclair



PHOTO: GEORGAKAKOS

Wain (David Renton) and his mistress Evelyn (Burgandy Code)

and Graham MacPherson respectively. They made it very easy to be drawn into the story.

Also worth noting are the debut performances at Neptune of two Dalhousie graduates, Elizabeth Beeler (Mary/Mrs. Stevens/Nanny) and Burgandy Code (as Evelyn (Wain's mistress)/Sadie/Woman).

The climax of the play is a painfully loud explosion which, although anticipated, was overwhelming in magnitude.

The set was extremely clever. The Citadel hill clock and the

boardwalk were always in view, with the different sets arranged on a lazy-susan affair below allowing for quick and unobtrusive scene changes.

The variety of lighting also differentiated each scene. One particularly impressive lighting trick was the snow effect created by dots of light falling like snowflakes.

On the whole, it was an enjoyable and entertaining play with historical and local appeal.

Barometer Rising is playing at the Neptune Theatre until December 6.

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**I've Heard the Mermaids Singing
A film that soars**

by Ellen Reynolds

Polly is an "organizationally impaired" person-Friday. She's rather goofy and she's over thirty, but she's also an endearing, unpretentious enjoyer of life. She is enamoured with her beautiful new boss, the curator. Unfortunately, the curator only has time for her lover, Mary, and the pretensions of the art world.

In *I've Heard the Mermaids Singing*, Polly (Sheila McCarthy) tells the story of her new job at

the art gallery, her photographs, and her escapes into a fertile imagination.

This original new Canadian film directed by Patricia Rozema soars with Polly's imagination as she indulges in zany daydreams like flying over the city, scaling tall buildings and walking on water.

I've Heard the Mermaids Singing is not glossy Hollywood material. It's Canadian and it's real entertainment. (See calendar page for listings.)



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