



# ARTS & CULTURE

## Dal Theatre performance ingenious and disturbing

BY PATRICK SHAUNESSY

From Wednesday to Saturday of last week, the Dalhousie Theatre Department presented their rendition of Arthur Miller's Tony Award-winning masterpiece, *The Crucible*. Written in 1953, the play describes the fanatical actions of the Puritans during the 1692 witch hunts in Salem, Massachusetts.

However, Miller also intended the play to mirror closely the contemporary witch hunts under Senator Joseph McCarthy. McCarthy instituted a hard system of justice for removing suspected Communists from America during the 1950s. During the time period many innocent Americans were brought to justice and condemned as Communist supporters; consequently, many people's lives were ruined as a result of McCarthyism. Even Arthur Miller himself was a victim of McCarthyism. He was fined for his refusal to name certain suspected citizens in the investigations, but was later acquitted of his crimes.

The play itself touches on the terrifying reality of religious fanaticism, and its ability to do harm in the name of justice. Furthermore, it examines human integrity and the will to stand against that which is wrong and unjust in society. The courage it takes for one to hold true to their beliefs, even in the face of certain death, is a quality that has been much lauded over the course of history. Miller, through his play, intended to show his fellow Americans how dangerous superstition can be when it is used as a fraudulent weapon against society.

Needless to say, the play was brilliant in its account of the Salem witch trials and its allusion to the

problem of McCarthyism.

The Dalhousie production of *The Crucible*, under the direction of Dennis Garnhum, was absolutely outstanding. Having studied the play, and having seen numerous theatrical productions of it, as well as the recent movie, I have to say that this was one of the best performances of *The Crucible* that I have ever seen.

The acting was definitely one of the strong points of the production.

There is a great wealth of talent in the theatre arts program, so it is difficult to point to any one actor who stood out among the rest. Yet some of the more phenomenal performances were by Matthew Kutas as John Proctor, Richard Davidson as Rev. John Hale, Jody Stevens as Abigail Williams, and Brett Delaney as Deputy Governor Danforth. Still, each actor played their part very well and helped to bring the entire story to life.

The set for the play was rather interesting. It consisted of the framed skeletons of various parts of a building which could be moved and re-adjusted to create the necessary scene; from the courthouse to the woods, this seemingly simple set demonstrated well its versatility.

The music helped to intensify and create the mood for the scene. Garnhum chose an eerie and sombre strings piece which lent

itself perfectly to the disturbing story. In all, the various parts of the production came together to form a marvellous whole; from costumes to lighting to stage props, the play was executed ingeniously.

*The Crucible* was definitely a show worth seeing. And I look forward to their next big production in February, which will be an adaptation of Lewis Carroll's classic *Alice in Wonderland*.

## Tampons, farts and hairy asses

BY JOHN CULLEN

If you were to judge Jann Arden by videos and lyrics alone, it would be hard to imagine that she has a dirty mouth. Her anecdotes and banter on Sunday were obsessed with those functions of life which usually remain under wraps — farts, hairy asses and tampons.

Between songs of guilt, lost love and other topics of general depression and despair, Arden spiced up her Sunday night Metro Centre show with a dry wit unrivalled by most performers. She left no creature of our society under rocks; every subject was fair game.

She spoke of periods, the 'Chia Penis' (a clay member which grows alfalfa, not likely to be seen in a Wal-Mart anytime soon) and other assorted nonsensicals which kept the audience roaring.

And the humour wasn't relegated to between songs. Arden and her crew of talented session musicians switched gears mid-set and served up a medley of swanky popular tunes from the 70's and 80's. Retro-kitsch may have lost its novelty a few years back, but Arden and the band side-stepped deftly from genre to genre; from the

Disco-Diva hit, "I Will Survive" to the piano bar staple, "Feelings" — giving the kitsch some new life.

Arden's second most impressive ability as a musician (next to her voice) is her ability to assemble a polished group of other musicians. Her backing band was exceptional, possessing the ability to re-create all the nuances of Arden's music in a live venue — and in the Metro Centre, that's no simple feat. Many studio musicians, or 'pros', have trouble playing with each other on stage, but Arden's band must have been rehearsing into the wee hours. The music was a soundscape with each musician adding another layer of texture to the mix.

Sunday night was not about egos, either. Arden, last year's host of the Juno Awards, told a hilarious story about meeting the pantheon of Canadian chanteuses backstage. She spoke of a fainting Celine Dion, a drunk Anne Murray, and a rhinestone Shania Twain all brought together in an obviously false tale of Canadian music mayhem. After this, Arden offered the audience a little diversity. Her percussionist/background vocalist, Lynn Elder,

took centre stage for two songs in promotion of her debut album to be released next week. Arden accompanied with some harmony, but let Elder steer the ship.

It is this obvious enthusiasm Arden has for music that sets her apart from other female singers. The night was dedicated to good songwriting — whether the tunes were hers or someone else's. She had the humble presence of an artist dedicated to her art, and hasn't let her relative fame engulf her.

With a strong acoustic set by singer/songwriter Mae Moore (I missed Bruce Guthro, the other opener), the evening was an honest celebration of Canadian talent.

Prior to the show, I was the type of guy who would hear the opening chords to "I Would Die For You" and quickly change the station. The evening was no religious experience, but no longer will I dismiss Arden and her ilk as easy listening pabulum for middle-aged, tone deaf spinsters. The truth is, Jann Arden is a very funny, talented woman.

## Titanic fodder for your coffee table

BY GINA STACK

### The Titanic: The Extraordinary Story of the "Unsinkable" Ship

By Geoff Tibballs

Raincoast Books

If you can get past the blatant pumps for December's feature film, *Titanic*, you might actually have a bit of fun with Geoff Tibballs' book about the unsinkable ship.

*The Titanic: The Extraordinary Story of the "Unsinkable" Ship*, is the kind of book that everyone loves as a child. It's a simple story with lots of action and beautiful, full page colour photographs.

The book is divided into four chapters. The first one looks at the competitive shipping industry of the late 19th and early 20th century. The *Titanic* was to be the "Queen of the Ocean". Tibballs clearly illustrates how the shipping industry raced ahead of outdated life-boat

regulations. Under the regulations, all British vessels of more than 10,000 tonnes had to carry 16 lifeboats with a capacity of 5,500 cubic feet, plus sufficient rafts and floats for 75 per cent of the capacity of the lifeboats. Consequently, an unimaginable ship of 46,000 tonnes, like the *Titanic*, was not required to carry any more lifeboats than a ship of 10,000 tonnes. As a result there were spaces in lifeboats for only one in three passengers aboard the great ship.

The second chapter takes us on board the magnificent luxury liner as it set sail on its fateful maiden voyage from Southampton to New York on April 10, 1912. The ship was equal to the finest hotels on the shore. On the night it sank, first class passengers enjoyed a seven course meal in the dining room. While first class passengers could do as they pleased, second and third class passengers were encouraged to retire early in the evenings, and single men and women were quartered separately at opposite

ends of the ship.

The third chapter is a play-by-play reconstruction of the night that the ship went down. Curiously, Tibballs points out that most of the first class passengers were American, as British well-to-do preferred the tried and trusted Cunarder vessels. There were no fewer than 20 newlywed couples on board and only one, the Bishops, from Michigan, lived to tell their story. The rest became widowed brides.

Greenland produces an average of 12,000 to 15,000 icebergs every year. Around 400 drift far enough south to endanger transatlantic shipping. Tibballs adds that 1912 was the mildest winter in 30 years. This may have caused more icebergs to fall south, but since he is not an historian, he does not explain whether these facts are significant. He does, however, show that warnings of approaching ice were not heeded by the crew.

Tibballs shows that the evacuation

of the ship was haphazard, and many lifeboats set down only half full because there were no available women and children on deck to board them. Noteworthy was the ship's band, which heroically played ragtime music to cheer passengers as they sunk to their watery grave.

The final chapter looks at past movies, books and a cd-rom game about the *Titanic*. This discussion builds to a plug for the current flick.

In this section, Tibballs also looks at attempts to salvage the steamer. Like the Dr. Robert Ballard whose team discovered the *Titanic* in 1986, he is against attempts to raise the ship. He does, however, have no objections to its memories being exploited in feature films and books, after all, "the *Titanic* is a subject no one will ever tire of".

If you're just looking for a nice coffee table book, Tibballs' book is for you. Otherwise, I'd suggest you save yourself some money and just go to the movie.



## Halifax

Wednesday, December 3 — Saturday, December 6, 8:00pm: Dalhousie Arts Centre

The Dalhousie Theatre Student Collective will put on the independent play *Life is a Dream*, about a family dealing with the ever-pervasive existence of utter silence in their lives. The play takes place in Studio One.

Friday, December 5, 9:00pm: McInnes Room

An all-ages show at Dalhousie? Really. **Rusty** and **By Divine Right** play in the SUB for everyone from the age of five to the age of fifty. First year students under the age of 19 can actually watch live music.

Saturdays and Sundays: December 6 to 21, 2:00pm and 7:30pm: Neptune Theatre

Neptune presents the holiday staging of Frances Hodgson Burnett's *The Secret Garden*; "an uplifting drama that will enchant the whole family."

Wednesday, December 10, 8:00pm: Market St. Jazz Cafe  
Jazznsamba present their latest CD at a release party. Entitled *Christmas Card*, the night could get you in to the holiday mood.

Tuesday, December 15 — Saturday, December 20: The Lower Deck

The home of celtic music in Halifax, the Deck will host the traditional stylings of McGinty. Saturday, December 27: Metro Centre

Honestly, when does Halifax get anything huge and commercially cheesy? No pro sports, no big name concerts, nothing. It all changes after Christmas when the **Backstreet Boys** bring their trail of broken teenage hearts through our backwards little town. Get down.