

John & The Missus - Downright intoxicating!

by Dorothy Becker

Watching the Neptune production of Gordon Pinsent's play, John and the Missus, was, for a relative new-comer to the Maritimes, a bit like tasting Newfoundland screech for the first time - the expectant taste buds quiver, ready for instant retreat, but, to their great delight, find themselves bathed in a decidedly lusty flavour which turns out to be downright intoxicating!

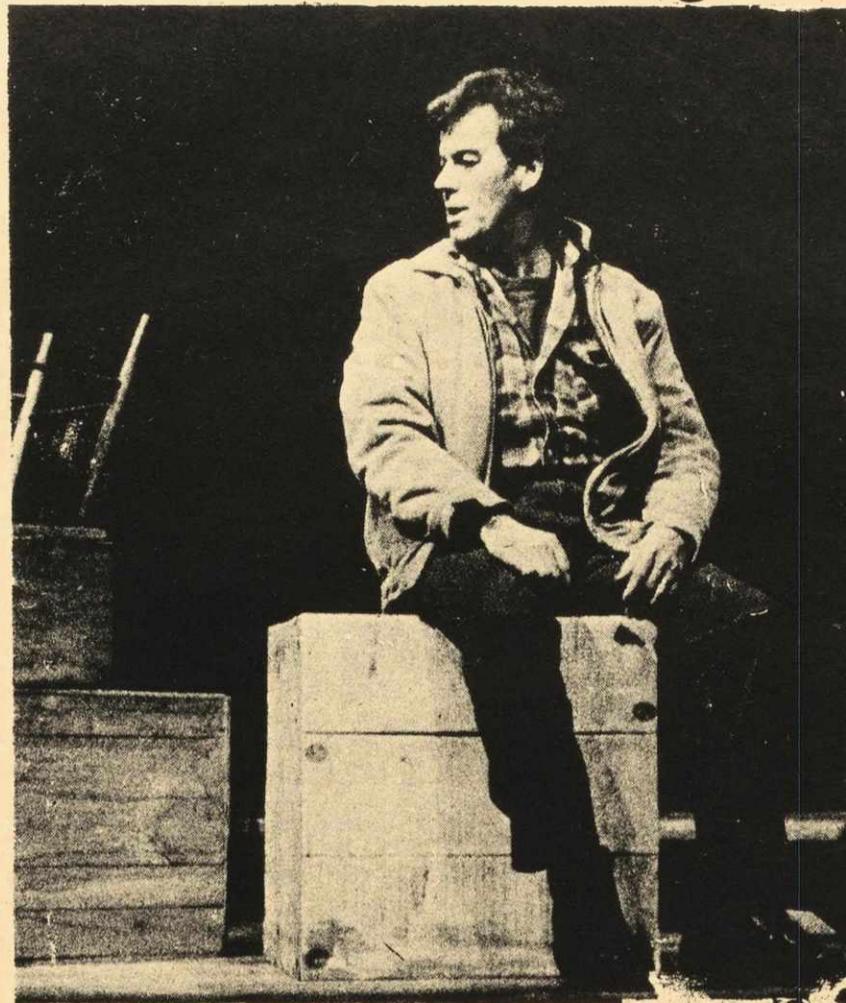
From the opening moments in the play, when John Munn, his son, Matt, and the other men of the small Newfoundland town descend into the mine, on which the life or death of the town depends, the audience is caught up in an atmosphere of affectionate and irrepressible good humour with a strong Newfoundland flavour which is sustained throughout the entire play. This is not to say that there are not many serious and even tragic moments in the play. There are. But Pinsent has skillfully interwoven the tragic and the comic elements of the play so that what emerges is a strong and vital sense of the interconnectedness between the participants and the events of their community and of their own lives, be these events mundane or heroic.

Gordon Pinsent plays John Munn, whose physical strength and intelligent clear-sightedness have made him into the natural community leader. Soon after the play begins, however, John is seriously hurt in a mine accident and his subsequently diminished physical strength hastens his realization that he is ageing. This, coupled with the knowledge that the mine will almost certainly be forced to close down, turns John, who was once the pivot of community activity, into a stubborn centre of resistance, desperately clinging to a crumbling world, attempts to hold back the lives of those around him. John's inability to ever really face leaving the home and the life he loves and his instinctive refusal to submit to the forces which threaten his strong sense of individuality make him a character who conveys not only the very real social problems of a small Newfoundland community threatened with the destruction of its way of life, but also the more universal human dilemma, that of man being faced with a system which threatens to demolish his very identity as the maker of his own fate. Pinsent plays the conflict-ridden character of John with a strong and sensitive sincerity which is thoroughly convincing.

Florence Patterson also gives an outstanding performance. She plays the Missus as a woman who is whimsical, loving, gutsy, and realistic, and who, in spite of her desperation and anger, never betrays the slightest hint of self-pity.

Frank Maraden also gives an excellent performance in his portrayal of Fred Budgell, the town's part-time undertaker, part-time teacher, and full-time day dreamer. Although in his fantasies Fred has left the town and its "uncivilized" ways long ago, in reality, he is a completely integral part of the community which sustains him and his eccentricities. His quaint pronouncements, delivered with a touch of nasal whine, provided some of the funniest moments in the play.

Four other performances deserve special mention. Frank Moore played the role of Matt, John's son, with a nice mixture of adolescent cockiness, innocence, and unstudied loyalty to his father. Douglas Chamberlain, as Sid Peddigrew, John's self-effacing and loyal friend, provided a very good contrast to John's brooding presence with his lively devil-may-care



Gordon Pinsent in his own work John & The Missus.

humour and, conversely, his escape into alcohol. Dennis Thatcher played Fudge, the ominously ever-present observer, almost timeless in his age, who, nevertheless, symbolized time's relentless push as he watches and waits for the inevitable fates of the characters. Thatcher managed to invest in the

character of the dingy old man a kind of caustic awareness which allowed him to be in the town and, yet, not of the town. Finally, David Hemblen played Raymond Burgess, a deserter to the town and the mine, who, after drunkenly trying to justify his leaving, is brutally beaten up while John stands by and

does nothing. Ironically, John condones this unjust punishment for the very thing he himself is being forced to contemplate.

Susan Benson and Michael Whitfield designed the set which was a rather ingenious collage of rough wood and homely furniture. The set managed to give the impression of rocky and hilly landscape intertwined with the rooms of the village homes. It heightened the strong sense of continuity in the play between exteriors and interiors, the community and the personal.

John and the Missus is now playing at Neptune will be there until February 21.

Tritt spectacular

by Lindsay E. Empringham

On Friday evening, February 6th, I went to the Arts Centre to hear William Tritt play the piano. He played different compositions by Bach, Liszt, Mendelssohn, Chopin, and Hindemith. Though I consider Chopin to be the greatest composer of piano music, the Liszt composition, "Mephisto Waltz", was the one which I felt best displayed Tritt's talent. Tritt was able to make the slower passages sing, and he handled the extremely difficult passages very well. There was a great deal of feeling put into the music, to do that, Tritt did not have to sway himself practically off the piano bench.

There is no question that William Tritt is a skilled pianist. It is that skill which has given him opportunities to perform at various centres in Canada, as well as in New York's Carnegie Hall.

Tritt deserved the standing ovation he received on Friday night; he's spectacular.

Required reading for February 14

The Shoppers Drug Mart Money saver.
Crammed with ideas to help you make your mark on Valentine's Day.
Special gift suggestions. Special ways to save. Pick up your Money saver at the Shoppers Drug Mart store near you.

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