

Learning The Citadel's craft

Interviews by Elaine Ostry

The Citadel Theatre is presenting a play this weekend, called *Two Pails of Water*. But the actors are not professionals or visiting performers, but students of The Citadel's own theatre school.

"Acting," says David McNally, one of The Citadel's teachers, "is nine tenths confidence." This self-confidence is what the school strives to develop in its students. This season's theatre school productions — *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* will be seen in February — intend to give the students a

"stripped of the layers" of tension and pretension. For example, people often "put on" a voice in certain situations. "As actors," continues McNally, "we need to be open... and connected to the things inside of us."

McNally brings classical experience to his position. He attended the National Theatre School in Montreal from 1982-84. He played Dionysus in Northern Light's *The Bacchae*, and has worked in the Catalyst Theatre as well as CBC "social action" dramas. McNally is presently finishing his education degree, specializing in drama.



Tony King and Ray Bury in *Two Pails of Water*

Photo Terry Ellis

chance to experience the live stage. McNally comments that then the teachers get to "see how people do when they're confronted with the nervousness of the stage."

The confidence required to perform on stage is developed by focusing on relaxation. "All techniques work to relaxation," comments McNally. McNally concentrates on vocal development in particular. "I'm working from my base of freeing the natural voice."

What is a "natural" voice? One that is

Students in McNally's classes learn about improvisation and interpretation. McNally concentrates on removing their bad habits and inhibitions. He and the other teachers are directing all the students towards show-cas scenes, which will be performed from May 2nd-8th.

The theatre school was founded fifteen years ago. At first it only featured drama workshops. Now, there are 28 classes of a total of 442 students, of ages ranging from eight year olds to great-grandfathers.



David McNally, teacher at the Citadel, strikes a pose.

Photo Bruce Gardave

Teachers include Mark Schoenberg, Tanva Rishi, Judy Cook and Lindy Sisson. The theatre school is administered by William Fisher and Gail Barrington-Moss, and helped by a parent advisory committee.

Ray Bury is currently in his fourth year at Citadel's theatre school. He plays Hoddel de Boddell, a rag and bone man, in *Two Pails of Water*. Even to be in one production for the whole year," he says, "is worth the fee."

Certainly the school's purpose of increasing the confidence of its students has worked for Bury. The experience "helps me out of shyness... it helps me be more outgoing."

Says Bury: "If I can't do it in front of the class, I can't do it on stage."

Bury believes that the experience of acting on stage is invaluable. "I learn more from being part of the production than from classes." *Two Pails of Water* is Bury's fourth production. He has also played the lead in *Scrapino*, a previous theatre school production. Bury was part of the *Cinderella* pantomime at the Watterdale last Christmas season.

Bury, who works for a plastering company, is pleased with the program because it "allows myself to expand into the arts." The theatre school "attracts people who want to be actors" and allows you "to find yourself."

Attending the school also helps you appreciate the work of other actors, comments Bury. "You know what they've gone through."

Two Pails of Water is an special challenge for Bury, because it is a children's comedy, and children's attention spans are short. Another aspect that Bury is working for is to "make it natural for the audience." This is difficult after four to six weeks of steady rehearsals.

Acting is a tough profession to prepare oneself for, as Bury says: "Actors are a dime a dozen." "I want to pay my dues," he comments.

The efforts of both students and teachers will be seen this Saturday and Sunday at the Rice Theatre in the production of *Two Pails of Water*.

Off-beat Brausen

Interview by Matt Hays

There's probably one word, above all others, that comes to mind while talking to actress Leona Brausen: Eccentric. Not eccentric in a bad way, you understand, but off-beat in a very endearing way.

Her hair is frazzled, and wavers out in all directions. Her expressions are large, but she never appears pretentious. Her gestures are interesting, but never contrived. Best of all, she is bubbling over with unusual little anecdotes.

This eccentricity has led to a certain amount of typecasting. She is, more often than not, cast as the wild and crazy character in plays.

While appearing in *Soap on the Rocks*, Phoenix Theatre's live improvised soap opera, for example, Brausen portrayed an avant-garde assistant to an Eastern European film director. Portraying a character who spoke virtually no English must have posed a number of problems.

"Improvisation," she explains, "is terrifying. Pressure! Sweat! During *Soap* I kept on hoping to get sucked off the stage by aliens, which was to be the eventual demise of my character. When the aliens finally did come, they forgot to pull me off stage with the other characters. I just pretended to pass out."

Brausen is unusual in a lot of other ways. She gets a great deal of work, despite a surprising lack of professional training.

"Well, I graduated from high school. In Stetler, Alberta. My parents moved out there to get away from the rat race. My friends and I were always doing productions out there, at lunch and after school. We had a real fascist drama teacher."

At this point, our interview transforms itself into a stream-of-consciousness conversation. We discuss everything — shopping in New York ("Once you've been in NYC, you can't get it out of your mind"), Toronto ("Try to find a clean bathroom in that town — it's scary"), and Lemoine's flop at the Fringe.



Leona Brausen

Photo Dave Jackson

Wait a second.

Stewart Lemoine had a flop at the Fringe??

"Oh Yeah. It was called *All These Heels* and was the strangest play ever written. I didn't understand what I was saying — it was extremely wordy. No one knew what their lines meant, except Stewart. It got panned, but it was a lot of fun."

That was Edmonton's first Fringe festival. Since then, Lemoine has written and directed a string of Fringe hits, and Brausen has starred in all of them. The Lemoine success heightened last summer, when the company rekked to Toronto to perform *The Vile Government*, for which they received rave reviews.

When the new Phoenix downtown venue opens, Brausen will appear in Lemoine's latest concoction, *Neck Breakin' Car Hop/Swiss Pajamas*. "It's about some lowlife scumbag — a girl who murders at the A&W. I think it's going to be kind of a spy thriller... Well, there's a spy in there somewhere... It's hard to describe!" (Many Lemoine show easy to describe)

Presently, Brausen is working on Beth Henley's *The Miss Firecracker Contest*. In it, she portrays a seamstress who makes outfits for frogs.

"I really like Henley's work. This play is realistic, but very unusual. What the characters are saying is real to them, but will be strange to the audience. The mood is often on the borderline."

Welsh web of morals

Merlin's Web
Susan Mayse
Irwin Publishing

review by Wendy Joy

Imagine the near future. England has a young, blonde Queen. Her oldest son Pip (the young Prince of Wales and heir to the throne) and his nanny are kidnapped by Welsh extremists who want home rule for Wales. But everything goes wrong for the kidnapers, and government security forces gradually close in.

This is the plot that Edmontonian Susan Mayse has devised for *Merlin's Web*. Even those unenamoured of the spy and thriller genre can find something to like in this novel.

The writing is sure and quick, creating a fast pace even in what is an intricate and complicated plot. The book manages to entertain even while on a deeper level it questions values and ethics.

Except for a few of the terrorists, there are no clear-cut villains in *Merlin's Web*. "Merlin" is the code name for Gwyn Davies, a college teacher who is the leader of the terrorists. He is not a violent person by nature; rather, he believes in his cause so much that he is willing to commit a drastic act to bring attention to the Welsh plight.

Davies is no villain, but he's not in the hero category either. There are no real "heroes" in the novel; the characters are all just varying degrees of ordinary people stuck in awkward and terrible situations. All have reason to question their motives and ethics, from the terrorists to the government hostage negotiator and the BBC reporter who covers the case and ends up knowing a lot more than he tells on the news.

The multiple viewpoint is one of the strengths of the book. There are not only black and white, nor absolute answers to the questions that the book raises. The reader has to wonder how far she or he can go for a cause — or a job or whatever — before you lose your soul. Morality (and lack of it) forms the subtle underpinnings of the novel.

If there is a fault with *Merlin's Web*, it is that the first quarter of the book sometimes moves slowly. Some of the elements of the plot seem unnecessary. But Mayse pulls everything together nicely, and it becomes the sort of book you don't want to put down. And best of all, the author doesn't give any pat answers to all the complex ethical questions that her characters raise. Some things are better questioned than answered.

And hey, for those of you who don't care about morals anyway, it's a fun book to read.

WORLDLY MUSIC

First Annual World Music Concert
8 p.m. Sat. January 16
Con Hall/Old Arts Building

by Jerome Ryckborst

There's a spanking new local event for music lovers. The faculty of music has organized *World Music*, a concert of traditional ethnic music.

The music department's Rick Williams says he hopes to make the performance an annual event. Williams wants the concert to feature many ethnic musical styles.

"We identified a number of ethnic groups from the Alberta Culture mailing list — about 250 people. It was actually a fairly large undertaking," said Williams.

The dress rehearsals were "quite spectacular," said Williams. He listed bagpipes, Spanish guitars, Philippine brass gongs, traditional Indian strings and drums from the evening's program. Tamil, East Indians, Ukrainians, Philippines and Scots will present their traditional folk music.

This year's concert is in recognition of a donation of over 2000 records to the University's Music Department from the New York-based Folkways label.