

Akerman — the insight track on Thomas More

by Frank McGinn

Review: *A Man For All Seasons*

Directed by Jeremy Akerman

The opening night was keenly awaited. Discerning Nova Scotians were eager to see what understanding the ex-NDP leader who had abandoned his party for a plum offered by the Tory government would bring to the tale of a man who stands by his principles unto death. Did Jeremy Akerman, tarnished idol, even have the right to discuss the complex morality of the saintly Sir Thomas More? Or, conversely, did he have the insight track?

There turns out to be a curious ambiguity of feeling to Akerman's production for the Kidney Foundation of Canada of the play *A Man For All Seasons*. Curious because there was nothing ambiguous about More, nor his heroic refusal to knuckle under and place King over God when the Church of England was being forged in the Reformation. He was simply a good man and, in the hands of playwright Robert Bolt, he is also dignified, witty and wise. He enjoys a lion's share of the good lines and *A Man For All Seasons*, as the movie demonstrated, can be the envigorating portrait of a great man during his finest hours.

Under Akerman's direction, Sir Thomas loses much of the stature which history and Bolt have conspired to bestow on him. Tony Johnstone is sort of large and round in the lead role and, while this need not necessarily count against a man playing the strong and noble, here it does. He is physically insignificant where he should be quietly compelling and he seems to have been instructed to play it for laughs. His More is absent-minded, foggy and ingratiating instead

of sharply precise and regal. He is still the central character but he is nobody's idea of a hero.

In addition to chopping the towering figure of More down to half size, Akerman has raised his opponents by several notches. Dominic Larkin is a flamboyant Thomas Cromwell, persecuting More while ringing with ripe, villainous laughter. As the perjured Richard Rich, Jari Matti Helpi is deeply superficial and Jim Swansburg does a loud, dense Duke of Norfolk. And Akerman himself takes on the role of the arch-political schemer Cardinal Wolsey, feigning age and sickness with apparent relish, as if he were playing a joke during a dull moment in House proceedings, and lecture More on the need to be practical when navigating the ship of state.

Given that the characters are shaded all wrong and the mood of the play is murky and diffuse when crystal clarity is obviously called for, it then becomes a question of whether or not this has been done on purpose. As it is an amateur production, the more ready explanation is that the effect is accidental. Plays put on by people who don't do it for a living are characterized by a hit-or-miss approach. In no particular order, some of the acting will be good and some awful and for no apparent thematic reason, some of the scenes will play well and some will die a slow death. All involved will give of their best but the final shape of the play will be as much due to fluke as design.

On the opposite hand the ironist in one would like to speculate that Akerman has given this moral spectacle exactly the treatment he intended. As an ex-Saint himself, he may have no patience with the

affairs of a statesman who yields so publically to the demands of his conscience. Akerman played it that way for years and where did it get him? (In the back, in the neck...) Now he has put idealism behind him and, perhaps, feels regretful that he wasted so many years trying. Hence this version of a man who may be for all seasons but is not for himself, and is

thus a fool. The bumbling, amiable Sir Thomas More of this production abdicates power and prestige to the political infighters, his family, The Common Man in short, to anyone who has the courage of their common sense.

If this is just a routine amateur production then it is only typically misguided and has enough good moments to keep it afloat, although at

three hours and 20 minutes running time, maybe some of the bad ones could be trimmed a little. If Jeremy Akerman is indeed pulling a profound ironic face behind the audience's back than the joke is on us, although at three hours and 20 minutes running time, it is a good laugh but not a great laugh.



'Shot in the Dark' on target

by Michael McCarthy

Record Review: *Shot in the dark* — the Inmates

There may be some hope for rock and roll yet. Out of the morass of sickly-sweet, over-produced clone "laid-back" muzak and posturing, superficial charlatans whose rebellion is all in them, not in their music, and which only lasts 'til the next cheque anyway, comes a band that sings and plays earthy, driving music with integrity. The Inmates are an English band playing what is basically American rhythm and blues music, drawing on the same inspirational vein as did groups like the Stones and the Animals before them. Of course, these boys are not as good as the early Rolling Stones; but then again, nobody ever has been. At least they are off on the right track, with an upbeat mixture of convincing songs, played with such energy and feeling that they almost merit the acme of rock/r&b denotations "raunchy." Also, it is refreshing that there are still some groups left

who would rather maintain a high quality of cuts by recording superior compositions by other artists, along with their own best original material, rather than go for the extra songwriting royalties and stuff the album with inferior self-penned works when they reach the end of their indigenous top-notch songs.

A pulsating rhythm section and clean, slashing guitar (à la Keith Richards) by lead Peter Gunn highlight throughout this collection of 11 songs. Six are covers, including a gutsy rendition of "Some Kind of Wonderful", an acceptable version of the Stones' "So Much In Love" (with suitable Jaggeresque vocal by Bill Hurley) and a full-tilt rollicking number called "Feelin' Good" with a beat that never quits (although it suffers from 20 or so superfluous repetitions of the word "boogie" in the lyrics, which otherwise are quite good).

Among the originals, only "Sweet Rain" fails to cut the mustard (it is also the only ballad on the album). "Crime Don't Pay" struts around a ver-

sion of the ubiquitous "Sweet Jane" chord progression, and "Tell Me What's Wrong" is a creative meld of rockabilly and deep-voiced blues which comes off very well. "Waiting Game" is a solid r&b number with excellent guitarwork and growling vocals. The records best cut is the lead-off (I Thought I Heard a Heartbeat), a powerful blues/rocker that reflects the influence of CCR, but is still original.

This is the Inmates second album, and shows a real flair for honest, hard-hitting music that is derived from the roots of rock, without seeming purely imitative and redundant. If writer Gunn (who uses the pen-name Staines) can continue to turn out high quality original material, and develop his style until it is clearly distinctive and unique, the Inmates may turn out to be one of the forerunners of the next decade. Even if they never improve, they will still provide a welcome onslaught of basic rock and roll in a sterile environment where most other acts seem to have forgotten, or never knew, how to play it.

have the rare power to stop me in my tracks on a busy day to listen all the way through to the end. The voice, arguably great, is the best to come out of the folk movement of the 60s, fuller than Joni Mitchell's and without the extreme tremelo of Joan Baez's. It has an edge on it that in the upper range tends to shrillness, but in the middle range is as resilient as polished steel. Only in its quietest moments does it truly glow like, say, Streisand's. Like Mitchell, Collins has a curiously thrilling way of flipping her voice into her head tones that is, because of the voice's relative fullness, more organically joined to the lower ranges.

Besides possessing a God-given singing voice, Collins is in firm and intelligent control of her instrument, and modules seemingly effortlessly from the most lyrical and sustained piano to surprising strength and heights. Her range was just one of the pleasant discoveries of the evening. Others were her comic delivery on such throwaway ditties as 'Junk Food Junkie,'

and her mastery of the shifting harmonies and dissonances of two others Sondheim songs, taken from his operatic paean to cannibalism, *Sweeney Todd*. These last, followed by the incomparable 'Send in the Clowns' (a popular art song, if there ever was one) indicated a musical intelligence that could never have been restricted to folk-singing, however well mastered. Indeed, Collins' opening number 'City of New Orleans' seemed almost an anomaly in the evening's repertoire, representative of a simpler musical youth that has flowered into more 'classical' forms, and promises at least another decade or so of fruition, as the voice approaches its peak.

For her encore Collins gave the audience a Rose, singing the recent Bette Midler song with a soaring variation. It was the perfect note to end on. I left the concert hall rejuvenated, refreshed and exhilarated. There is a word for the agent of such effects on our senses and minds, a word for what Judy Collins gave us: art.