Excalibur

Nobody knows at the Crest

By BRIAN PEARL

desperation are rarely written by poor or desolate people. When those unknown people do finally express themselves in public, the stage is the streets and the only critic that matters is the government. The Me Nobody Knows is a play written, originally, by the children and adolescents of the Puerto Rican Poor White and Black ghettoes of New York. The material that the play is based on appeared first as a paperback book called The Me Nobody Knows in January, 1969. The book was the result of the concern of one man, Stephen Joseph, with the chronic, silent anguish of the people who live in urban ghettoes, especially the children and young men.

The result was material that is articulate poetry, but often sounds like prose choked with bitterness. The group of players, who are very different from each other in most ways, are tied together strongly in two very real ways. First, all of them believe that the ghetto, their environment, is an ugly hole, worthless and demeaning to human nature. Also, they all express a deep disillusionment with the false hypocritical concern of society as a whole and they feel very, very uptight emotionally and physically. The way they say it is: "Hard to tell you how I feel,

Everything is so unreal,

Lord, but life is a hard thing to get to.

In New York, a school teacher constructed a 30-minute streettheatre production based on the material in the book. The idea caught on with a group of experienced off-Broadway show people, and when The Me Nobody Knows opened on May 20 of last year, the impact and success of the play were stunning. The cast was made up of New York ghetto children who, naturally enough, played the role of New York ghetto children very, very well indeed. The Toronto production is one of the first showings of the play outside New York.

The show's history is worth Plays about poverty and recounting, as I have, but here in Toronto, we all have to deal with the Freiberg-Onrot production. The story of this production is not quite as glorious. The cast, for one thing, does not have the experience that the members of the New York cast had of growing up in a ghetto themselves. Most of the cast members are from Toronto, and all, with the possible exception of Lerio Wiggens and Steven Wragg, who play very bleak, thoroughly alienated blacks very, very well, do not express the ghetto experience with their whole body. Such expression is very rare on the stage and is only reached in situations like the New York production of The Me Nobody Knows, when the real lives and the play lives of the cast relate so closely.

Near perfect acting

This does not mean, though, that the Toronto cast doesn't apply all their considerable talents, intellects and discipline to the job of portraying ghetto-dwellers. The singing, dancing and acting are near-perfect. The only possible complaint I can have is that their discipline was a little too evident in a play where ease and naturalness should be very evident. But this small lapse is altogether excusable in the light of the scant stage experience of most of the young cast and their initial unfamiliarity with some very difficult material. In time, if The Me Nobody Knows has a long run in Toronto, the cast should learn to express the play with ease and security. But will they have that time?

The set is a small piece of ghetto, equipped with slide and film projectors to cover the drab, pale walls. The slides are children's paintings which, when projected, often look like elegant, tapestries or colourful murals. The set gains depth, which it badly needs, through the projections. The sound is good in most parts of the stage except for front and centre, a strange oversight. But the stage is, like the play, an expression of

poverty and ghetto life translated \$8.50 on the weekends for a good for the middle-class audience. Brecht would retch.

Since I want to be very honest, I'll mention two personal — and barely justified reactions I felt towards the play myself. First off, what, I thought to myself, is the relevance of The Me Nobody Knows to Toronto itself. Since we can't relate to the play as a New Yorker might, and that relation was of central importance to the success or failure of the play off-Broadway, is The Me Nobody Knows weakened significantly in the transplant from one city to another. It's fine theatre, with music and dancing and group relationships on a real level that reminded me strongly of Hair (the New York, not the Toronto Hair). The structure and sentiment of The Me Nobody Knows and Hair are similar; a number of serially, or barely related events tied together by nothing except an unusual, interesting environment. But the audience carries its interest in that environment to the theatre. It is not aroused in them once they are there.

The second twinge of regret concerns that old, sour ripoff feeling I get when I hear of plays that charge unusually large prices for a good seat. At the Crest, which is a small theatre located just south of Eglinton on Mount Pleasant, the cheapest seat is \$3.50 for a back seat at a Sunday matinee, and the most expensive is

seat. The producers are overestimating the value of their play to the Toronto audience and they are making it impossible for many people to even consider seeing the show, among them students and all the poor people the show itself is obviously concerned with.

Just as we go to press, word comes that the Crest has instituted a student price for tickets not sold one-half hour before the show. The tickets will cost three dollars on weekdays and Saturday at six o'clock and four dollars on Friday, Saturday and Sunday nights. The matinee, which will soon change from Sunday to Wednesday afternoon, will also cost three dollars if you are a student and can find a ticket a half an hour before the show, which is very likely.



November 19, 1970 13



Cut your entertainment bill in half and save over \$200.00 at restaurants, theatres, sports, discotheques and pubs with "Passport to Toronto" entertainment booklet.

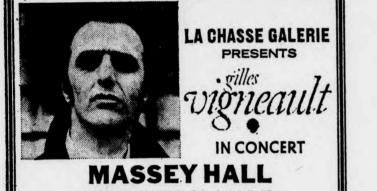
Available for only \$1.95 in the Central Square, Hum. Bldg.

89 Avenue Road Free Parking Monday thru Thursday after 7 p.m.

"ONE OF THE MOST PROVOCATIVE AND RELEVANT FILMS THIS YEAR! ABSORBING THROUGHOUT-WELL WORTH A VISIT! PAUL NEWMAN AND JOANNE WOOD-WARD ARE BOTH SUPERB! A FASCINATING PAIR! "

Frances Herridge, New York Post

"WUSA' PACKS A TERRIFIC PUNCH! IT IS A FILM OF URGENCY AND CONVICTION' WITH A PLEA IN ITS **VOICE WORTH LISTENING TO! JOANNE WOODWARD** IS A CONSUMMATE ACTRESS! THE SCRIPT IS TOUGH AND VIGOROUS! "



Rex Reed, Holiday Magazine

SATURDAY, DEC. 12, 8:30 P.M. TICKETS \$2.00, \$2.50, \$3.50, \$4.50

MAIL ORDERS: Send cheque or money order together with a self-addressed stamped envelope to MASSEY HALL Box Office, 178 Victoria St., Toronto.

.Tickets also available at LA CHASSE-GALERIE, 15 GLEBE RD. W., Tel.: 489-5413

welcome to

ROD McKUEN

author of STANYAN STREET AND OTHER SORROWS, LONESOME CITIES, LISTEN TO THE WARM and other books of poetry.

Mr. McKuen is appearing at Massey Hall November 23rd and 24th.

Random House of Canada Limited Toronto

