

ARTS

# Living on the fringes of society

by Laura Martins

*The Crackwalker*  
at the Tarragon's Extra Space

Judith Thompson knows how to make an audience squirm.

Her play, *The Crackwalker*, currently playing at Tarragon Theatre's Extra Space, is a dis-

turbing look at four people living on the fringe of society.

Much of this production's strength lies in the performances. Randy Hughson, who plays Alan, delivers a brilliant and convincing portrayal of an unstable character's inability to understand or cope with everyday life.

When we first see Alan, he's a seemingly harmless and naive character who idolizes his friend

Joe (Ron White), a macho, bullying character who is involved in an abusively volatile relationship with his girlfriend Sandy (Cheryl Swarts).

However, as the play ensues, Alan's psychological state is far worse than first thought.

The presence of the Indian street person (Clayton Odjig) during Alan's emotionally charged monologues, reveals Alan's

fragile sanity and creates strong parallels between both men.

Both are social outcasts and Alan's fear of, and refusal to help the nameless man is due in part to his own fear that someday he will end up on the street.

Alan's psychological turmoil is transformed into violence which eventually explodes on stage, resulting in the tragic outcome of the play. I won't give this away, but I'll admit that it's a difficult scene to sit through.

Fortunately, the heaviness of the violent scenes are bearable because throughout most of the play we are able to laugh — not at the terrible actions, but at the manner in which the characters express themselves.

Kirshenbaum is perfect in the role of Theresa. She's a misunderstood and pathetic character, yet Thompson makes her wonderfully comedic.

Theresa's humour makes us sympathize with her and allows

to handle the verbal and physical violence on stage.

Directors Urjo Kareda and Andy McKin succeed in achieving a balance between the humour and the disturbing elements.

The blasts of ominous violin music in between scenes provides an effective foreboding quality, as does the bright red and white lighting during Alan's monologues.

You may feel exhausted by the end of the play, but this is not necessarily a bad thing.

The play is fascinating in that it reaches the audience in a very direct and visceral way. Thompson's ability to create characters who come across as real is crucial to the production.

She has a sensitive ear for rhythmic dialogue which is explicit and helps to define the individuality of each character.

*The Crackwalker* continues at the Tarragon's Extra Space until December 16.

## Technical wizard rivets crowd

by Stanley Feldman

The Toronto Philharmonic Orchestra  
featuring Ivry Gitlis  
at Massey Hall

It was an all-Tchaikovsky program last Sunday evening when the Toronto Philharmonic Orchestra performed their second show of the 1990/91 season. The featured soloist, on the *Concerto in D major* for violin and orchestra, Op. 35, was Ivry Gitlis, a name not familiar to Toronto audiences.

From the moment he walked on stage, it was apparent that here was no orthodox violinist. From his casual, almost rural appearance, to his technical wizardry, Gitlis had the normally staid crowd riveted.

He played with supreme confidence and originality, as if he were almost possessed by Tchaikovsky himself. His sensitivity, particularly in the *Canzonetta*, perhaps betrayed Gitlis' own roots, bursting with Russian themes and melancholy.

The *Violin Concerto* was preceded by the *Waltz* from Act 1 of the ballet, and *Swan Lake*, an old Tchaikovsky winner. After the interval, the program continued with the *Symphony No 4 in F minor*, Op. 36.

The orchestra, ably conducted by the TPO artistic director Paul Robinson, were affected with the same enthusiasm exhibited by Gitlis. They seemed determined to equal the violin master's vibrancy with a virtuosity of their own. A fact illustrated by Robinson's energetic conducting that almost propelled him from his podium.

Tchaikovsky liked to wear his heart on his sleeve. Hypersensi-



Ivry Gitlis' performance an aural delight of grand proportions is a true wooden man in this not so wonderful animated fairy-tale

tive and somewhat neurotic, he seemed to live on an emotional roller-coaster. In spite of himself he was readily acknowledged as a master of romantic symphonic music, operas, and classical ballet scores. He had a supreme talent for portraying tragic emotion through music, and the *4th Symphony* epitomizes his personal torment.

While the TPO was able to rise to this emotional level, they clearly lacked some of the pas-

sion present when Ivry Gitlis performed his magic. Indeed, through the encouragement of Paul Robinson, they showed more vigor than usual, but clearly these talented musicians could not keep the pace set by the maestro.

All facts considered though, this all-Tchaikovsky performance was an aural delight of grand proportions. The TPO represented themselves well in the midst of a gifted violinist.

## Playing with Dance medium

by Nadine Saxton

*Jeux*  
conceived by Robert Desrosier  
the Premiere Dance Theatre

Imagine every free movement ever experienced in your life, extend them beyond your abilities, bend them, turn them inside out, and you have Robert Desrosier's new work, *Jeux*.

In *Jeux*, Desrosier makes a departure from his customary theatrical props and concentrates instead on dance.

*Jeux* is Desrosier's examination of the cycle of life which he sees as a never ending flow of movement.

Time, (danced brilliantly by David J. Wood) is the connecting link between the sections of this production. Wood, dressed in oriental garb, appears onstage, ticking away the years with staccato arm movements, deft leaps and incredible turns.

The talents of the Canadian Children's Dance Theatre are employed as Desrosier examines

infancy, childhood, the elementary school years, adolescence, and early adulthood. These children are remarkable as they roll like babies, jump like jacks, and cavort on the school yard with the members of Desrosier's company.

The dancers of the company are fantastic. Everyone has the elastic, non-muscular quality that Desrosier is known for. They are like cats as they jump, turn, land on their knees, then spin off into the next, accelerated sequence.

The choreography suits each dancer's qualities but stretches and pushes them to their physical limits. One has to ask how long these dancers' bodies will last under incredible athletic and acrobatic strain that is placed on them.

Choreographically, the second half of the production entitled "Life Carnival" is not as successful as the first. It seems Desrosier ran out of ideas for the years between 20 and 70. Perhaps the reason for this departure from the

theme of the cycle of life is that he has not experienced the life of a "normal" adult and therefore does not have the same experience from which to draw. Instead, "Life Carnival" is a seamless, unending flow of movement from one section of dance to the next.

The costumes, lighting, sets, and music all add to each section of the life cycle. Dancers wearing rattles and diapers portray babies, while Raggedy Anne and Andy take on a new look in red masks, yellow hair, and blue jumpers. Adolescence is unmistakably consumed in black tank tops and jeans.

The original score composed by Eric Cadesky, and John Lang created a wonderful mood for each section. Familiar piano music, filled with intentional mistakes delightfully reminded the audience of lessons endured, while the romantic passages indicated first love. The fast pace of the music helped to create the illusion of nonstop action as we whirl towards old age.

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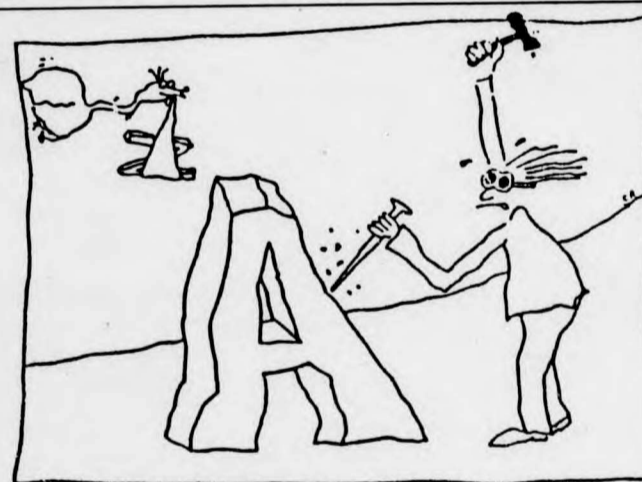
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