

Why must Noel and Gertie go on?

BY JOSEE-ANN CLOUTIER

Is there reason to glorify two pompous, assed, artificial, money driven beings, based on the fact that they could work coherently together?

The Theatre Arts Guild's production *Noel and Gertie*, directed and produced by the

Gratwick partnership, uses words and music from Noel Coward's original works.

This production is suitable for the early baby boomers and their parents, if they are keen on repetitive cliches from the life and times of early American stars. This business of show business runs at the Pond Playhouse from

October 7-23.

The audience is brought to a world of various theatres, hotel rooms, train stations and balconies in the 1930s, 40s and 50s. While holding Noel and Gertie's hands, one witnesses their personal and professional relationship.

Jeff Pocock introduces the initial contact between audience and the stage with his simple yet, effective design that allows the actors to play in varied settings. Judy Reade's props add delightful finish to the world of cigarette holders, candles on grand pianos and champagne glasses to mention a few. Shaking pink dresses, fur coats and tuxedos are additional touches that highlight the era, thanks to Lyn Gratwick and

Sheena Dickson. However, the characters and actors are another story.

Noel Coward, played by Keith Rogers, is represented as a cold and serious one dimensional character. Even though he wrote music and plays, becoming somewhat famous, his life and relationship with Gertie is as interesting as counting squares on a tile floor.

In order to compensate, Vanessa Burh's gentle poise and angelic voice leaves one floating in their seat, as she portrays Gertrude Lawrence. Burh played numerous roles with the Gilbert and Sullivan Society, such as the lead role in *Cinderella*. George (Kevin Nugent) and Lil (Michelle

Moore) playing a vaudeville sequence from Coward's play *Peppers* will forever leave a resounding echo of laughter in the Pond Playhouse.

Last but not least, the pianist Carolyn McDonald is cleverly integrated as a character. The music by itself is somewhat of a character. McDonald plays ever so cleanly through the melodrama, and despite the downfall driven by the dollar sign, Noel and Gertie always had music to hold their hand.

One last thing — *Noel and Gertie* is recommended for those kind hearted people who will take their elders out for a night "away to sea."

Monday night jazzin'

BY JAY CLEARY

At about 10:00 every Monday night, something special is happening in Halifax. A rare breed of musicians are gathering at the Economy Shoe Shop for a smoke filled night of smooth lounge jazz.

This week The John Chaisson Trio lit up the room with their charismatic stage presence, charm and impressive musicianship. Supporting Chaisson's soothing vocals and smooth bass lines was Halifax luminaries Dave Staples on piano and Scott Ferguson on drums.

Chaisson and Ferguson, formally of the Rankin family, joked about finally getting to strut

their stuff as jazz musicians.

The ambiance at Economy Shoe Shop was very awkward. First of all the stage is set up in a place in which it is difficult to get an unobstructed view. Secondly, the middle aged crowd were more concerned with conversation, treating the trio as background music. Only during the second set, when the bar crowd left, did the jazz become an intimate entity.

The trio improvised through songs by Sarah Vaughan and Miles Davis, and their move to add a half-time funk-feel to some classic standards got the audience bopin'.


Our conversations with pianist Dave Staples revealed that the revival of a local jazz scene in

Halifax had been tapering off in recent years.

"The calibre of musicians on these Monday nights is impeccable, next week Doug Mallory is playing, he was involved with some of Ann Murray's greatest hits," Staples said.

The Shoe Shop's bartenders told us it sometimes gets out of control, the stage that barely fits the trio was once occupied by a guest appearance of 15 musicians from *Riverdance*.

Having seen the precedent of the John Chaisson band it is certain that every week will be a treat. Anyone into jazz is sure to be entertained every Monday at the Economy Shoe Shop.



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