

Romeo and Juliet: Star cross'd beauty

by Chris Morash

Romeo and Juliet, Shakespeare's tale of the "star-cross'd lovers" who dared to let their passion bridge a gulf of family hatred, has moved audiences for over three centuries. Nevill Coghill once wrote that it "can only fail by some gross and wilful perversity in production, crass vulgarity or mere incompetence."

Neptune Theatre's current version of this masterpiece is far from vulgar or incompetent, and although it does not rise to its tragic potential, it touches the heart of the story's haunting beauty.

Peggy Coffey's Juliet is the living epitome of this beauty. In the course of the play, we see her performance blossom into the innocently sensual portrayal of a young woman feeling the first sweet torments of love. Coffey shimmers with an unaffected charm, whether she is writhing on the floor in unsatisfied desire, begging the night to come so that she might be with her Romeo, or seething with anxiety, wondering if she should take the death-feigning potion. She makes real the agony and ecstasy of being in love with the son of her father's worst enemy.

Ian Deakin as Romeo is equal to his co-star's abilities, although perhaps not quite the force one might have expected after seeing him as Ariel in last year's **Tempest** at Stratford. However, if Coffey's forte is the intensity and realism of her emotions, Deakin's is his

ability to shape the fluid rhythms of Shakespearian language into a symphony of sound and lyrical interpretation.

In fact, most of the cast seem to have captured the script's soaring cadences quite well, though Max Reimer, who plays Paris, has a dead delivery that stands out in this show like Conway Twitty would stand out in an opera. Thank goodness he did not say much.

There are some fine performances from the support cast, many of which go far beyond the call of duty. Among those who deserve extra commendation are Stephen McMulkin, who made the bit part of Peter into a real treat, Kim Coates as Tybalt, Robert Walsh's Friar Laurence, and George Merner in his powerful portrayal of Lord Capulet.

Particularly praiseworthy is Maurice Godin as Mercutio. Godin gives this young knight energy, humour, and courage while giving the audience some of the finest and funniest physical stunts of the evening. He so captured the audience's imaginations that eventually his very entrance would send ripples of anticipatory laughter through the house.

When he is slain early in the play's development, the audience feels the full force of the tragedy; and in this we have a good example of why Neptune's **Romeo and Juliet** does not live up to its potential. When Godin's Mercutio is slain, a height of tragic feeling is reached

that the production is unable to top.

This is unfortunate, for as Shakespeare himself states, "never was a story of more woe / Than this of Juliet and her Romeo." In a play such as this, in which one tragic event follows on the heels of the next, there should be some sense of dramatic build-up; a sense that however tragic the events that just took place might have been, those to follow will be even more tragic, until at the play's climax, we will have scaled the devastating heights of tragic feeling where wisdom is found.

Director Alan Scarfe does not seem to have accomplished this in the Neptune production; consequently, what could have been an extremely powerful scene - the final tableau of death, strewn with the corpses of Romeo, Juliet, Paris and Tybalt - is instead somewhat anti-climactic.

This is not to pronounce the entire show a failure; it is just not as satisfying as one suspects it could have been. In fact, many elements of Neptune's **Romeo and Juliet** are nothing short of excellent, among these Bob Doyle's stunning costumes and ingenious set. The set is an adaptation of the one used for **West Side Story**, which is running in repertory with its Shakespearian counterpart, and once again lends not only a thread of entrapment and towering doom to the play, but uses Neptune's pitifully small stage to the maximum, allowing room for spectacular swordfights (at one point,



Pat (Shanna Kelly) discusses her future as a bag lady in training with her quasi-suicidal husband Mike (Glenn White) in Dalhousie Theatre Productions' presentation of **American Modern** which shared the double-bill with "Canadian Gothic". The Joanna Glass duo was seen in Studio One of the Dalhousie Arts Centre. "A Midsummer Night's Dream," the next production, runs from Nov. 30 to Dec. 4.

I counted six blades swinging at once) as well as a stately dance.

All of this should remind us that it is about time Neptune got the new stage it deserves. I hope that the powers-that-be in government (federal, provincial and municipal) will come down

from their ivory office towers to see both **West Side Story** and **Romeo and Juliet**. Maybe then they will realize that it is time we dug a jewel like the Neptune Theatre out of its hole in the wall and put it in the finer setting it deserves.

Local Talent-Unnoticed

by J. Watson for ckdu

Halifax has a lot of local talent but it doesn't have enough support. On October 22, three area bands played at the Garden, drawing only a small crowd.

Staja Tanz opened with their synth-pop, styled after the Human League "new wave" genre. Heavy reliance on drum programming held the band down through the entire set. It stifled spontaneity in the performance and caused awkward "technical" pauses between songs. Much needed relief was provided somewhere in the middle of the set when members of the band did a rhythmic chanting piece, which came off as one of their best of the night.

This band has a lot of potential, but needs a humanizing element to it; performers mastering instruments instead of being "extensions-of-machines" will allow them to relax on stage and even dance, even when the audience is a trifle reluctant.

Relaxed describes the performance of the Bodeens, the second band of the evening. There was something about their Country/Rockabilly music which released the tension built up during the first set. The somewhat

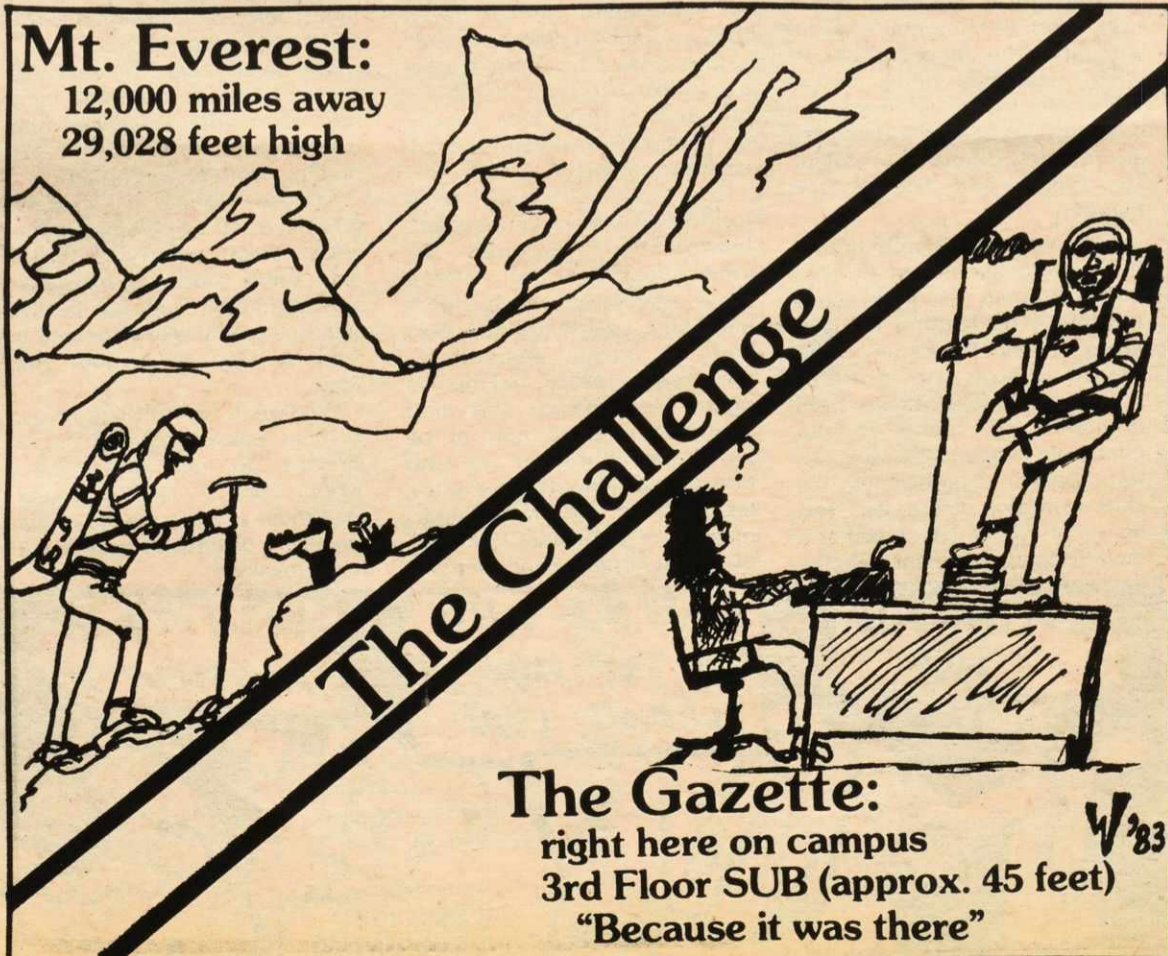
tongue-in-cheek renditions of country giants like Johnny Cash relaxed the audience's inhibitions, allowing them to release their energy on the dance floor. Unfortunately, as the band (and audience) lost energy, they lost interest as well, and the end dragged.

But energy is, to some extent, contagious, and the Euthenics infected the entire house with it. Their Joy Division/New Order musical oppression forced the audience to yet more gyrating contortions on the dance floor. Here is a band; the sound is tight, the cover material deviations are noted and appreciated, and the original stuff is clever and promising.

Support is essential in a community in order to keep bands like these alive and improving. Without them, we will be forced to rely upon the whims of the big bands to grace us with their expensive presence.

A second chance to view all three bands is available: Saturday, October 29 sees Staja Tanz and the Euthenics at the Art College and the Bodeens will open for Dub Rifles, a Winnipeg band, on November 10 in the same spot.

Mt. Everest:
12,000 miles away
29,028 feet high



The Gazette:
right here on campus
3rd Floor SUB (approx. 45 feet)
"Because it was there"

W '83