

ENTERTAINMENT

They've dunn it again! Dal-Kings drama

by Michael McCarthy

Thornton Wilder's Pulitzer Prize-winning *Our Town* has become something of a standard, reliable crowd-pleaser in the States, and the Dalhousie-King's Drama Society revived it at the Dunn Theatre last week with promising results. The play is in three acts, and is an attempt by the author to provide future generations with a record of what life in his epoch was truly like; not the rare moments, or the crises, but everyday living. "This is how we really were", as the lead character put it.

The play is somewhat unconventional, in that it does not try for the suspension of disbelief (a backward way of saying the illusion of reality) that most plays since Ibsen

have strived for. The set is symbolic, with a bit of fence serving to mark a yard and house ("For those who feel they need scenery", it was explained), and table and chairs the only interior furnishings. Props were eschewed, with many household items and activities being mimed. The lead character is "The Stage Manager", who acts as a guide to the whole play, explaining events and characters which are going to be seen, or which have a bearing on what is going to be seen, and frequently coming on stage to break up a scene and verbally set up another one, while it is physically set up behind him in full view. All in all, it is a very homey, easy-going play, which gives you the effect of listening to an old relative reminisce about people you know or have

heard of, sitting in front of a fire with the rest of the family in the living room. The characters of the small town Groves Corners are observed in snatches from their lives over the years 1901 to 1913.

The role of Stage Manager was well handled by Mark Yeardon. An appropriately relaxed drawl, coupled with an unhurried gait, and the appearance and mannerisms of an aging but still safely active, friendly neighbour brought just the kind of appeal this character needed. He has to hold the play together, and keep the attention of the audience from wandering as the action passes from vignette to vignette. Yeardon's poise and easy delivery captured the audience's confidence, and they followed him through the play as one would follow a trusted

and respected friend of the family through a house tour. There was a slight problem with unvaried upward inflection at the end of his sentences, but this was not too obtrusive and improved towards the end of the play. Yeardon also pulled off taking part in the action, then coming back out to comment on it, which is difficult to do without alienating the audience.

Also impressive was Danny MacIvor as archtypal American youth George Gibbs. MacIvor imbued his performance as a boy with bountiful energy and enthusiasm, plus the myriad strangely complicated guilt and love feelings of an adolescent, then added a steadier voice, a sense of responsibility, and ambition to start off right with his own family as he played the more

mature George. Thanks to his bearing and the costumes, he actually seemed to grow taller, straighter, and fill out as he played progressively older versions of his character. Catherine McLeod and Mary Guildford were convincing mothers, and successfully carried off extensive miming of preparing meals, etc., with no props. Andrew Boutilier handled his role of father and town paper editor well, giving the role enough weight that he was believable as a middle-aged man. Scott Emery shone as the town drunk, and Bruce Rae had an entertaining brief appearance as a professor who related some facts about the town to better acquaint us with the setting. Several actors had the difficult job of playing more than one small role, and did it convincingly.

Lemmon gives performance of the year

by Michael McCarthy

Tribute is easily the best film of this season. It is a very warm, funny, moving and poignant motion picture, worthy of every superlative you can imagine, in every aspect of the production. Bernard Slade's script (from his play) is painstakingly comprehensive, human, and subtly powerful; the casting is spot on; the acting is brilliant; Bob Clark's direction is sharp and always in control; the editing has resulted in a flowing, always captivating story (quite a feat in a movie of such length) with enough space for the definitive nuances of the film to melt through.

Head and shoulders above everything else is the tremendous work of Jack Lemmon, who, as Scottie Templeton, is the central, cohesive, and motivating figure, a man whose failure to achieve what he was capable of is underscored by impending death from a disease of the blood ("after all these years, it finally turned on me", he says). Lemmon has fi-

nally found, in this character, the perfect meld of natural humour, which has been his forte, and human drama — a meld the Academy Award winner has been looking for over some years now.

Not only is his current portrayal the best effort of the year, it is, in my opinion, unsurpassed as an awesomely extensive, dynamic, and complete dramatic performance by any role yet created on film, be it Brando in *On the Waterfront*; DeNiro in *Taxi Driver*; or any of the great characters of Olivier, Guinness, Robertson, etc.

Scottie is a New York promo man and manager for performers. He is loved by everyone for his non-stop onslaught of humour and wild, generous friendliness. Only he and his son know that it is a front, an insulating shield against ever having to form a real relationship, or attempting to realize his potential. When confronted by death, he wants to draw something from his life to pass on to his son. He has nothing worthwhile — except his zest for life, his ability to enjoy.

His son, however, has a different front. In the shadow of his father's ebullience, he has withdrawn ("maybe I didn't like always being the straight man") and become an emotionally unresponsive, staid loner, who enjoys nothing, never lets go. He despises the way his father hides behind jokes and runs from responsibility. When his father asks him to stay with him, to enable them to become better acquainted, Jud Templeton says he'll hang around "To see if there is anything about this son-of-a-bitch I can admire." He finds out what he and his father have in common: a failure to have ever made a commitment to anyone or anything.

Lemmon is magnificent as he progresses to a true understanding, and facing, of his own failures. Several scenes stand out in their sheer power and clarity, especially one in

alone achieved. The final scene, during the "Tribute" to Templeton, in which he manages to finally discard his defense mechanisms and speak honestly in an appeal to

aids, but never obscures or obtrudes. None of the actors is permitted to get out of hand, and the focus is constantly kept directly on the matter at hand, which is one man's attempt to justify, or at least salvage, his life or a part thereof.

Standout support comes from Kim Cattrall, a beautiful extrovert foil for Benson's inwardness, Lee Remick as Templeton's still sympathetic ex-wife, who quietly but firmly holds father and son together emotionally, Colleen Dewhurst as Scottie's friend/doctor, and Lou Daniels as his partner and top fan.

Comedy is handled with as much aplomb as drama. Lemmon is constantly cracking one-liners, responding to them, and running routines with or without an audience. Jud gets his girl back by standing on a tricycle, with a noose around his neck and strung over a rafter, and saying "Take me back, or push the bike away". There is a subtle juxtaposition of statement and humour, as when Scottie redons an old gag chicken-suit to try and reach his son, then winds up answering questions as he removes the suit, revealing himself both physically and personally.

The dialogue is as witty and powerful as I have ever heard, and the story line touches the heart without being mawkish. Bernard Slade is a writer to be watched for in the future, although topping this will be a difficult order. Canadian production team Drabinsky and Michaels are well on the way to making Canada an important film producer, instead of the U.S. satellite we have always been in the feature film area. *Tribute* is a movie which will be talked about and respected for as long as films are a part of our cultural milieu.



which he breaks down in the company of his ex-wife, going from desperate wall-crawling humour to tears, anger, helplessness, self-mockery, and finally total, bare vulnerability, reaching out for help for the first time in his life. The scenes between him and his son, played with perfect stilted, dull, overcontrol by Robbie Benson, also strip the characters to the bone with mutual, slashing recriminations and raw-nerved tension, penetrating the father-son relationship to a depth rarely attempted, let

his son, is dynamite. He releases all his self-hate and fears, faces his failures, and almost comes up empty-handed. The movie does not "cop out" with an everything's-rosy-now ending, but does allow some hope for at least a small reward for being human, or trying very hard to be.

Director Clark draws the best out of his actors in both intimate, one-to-one scenes in which the stark characters fill the screen, and also in group or crowd scenes where lots of extra "business" decorates, or

