

arts & entertainment

Mortality, heritage inspire Mic Mac poet

by Leslie J Furlong

Rita Joe is sitting with me listening to poets taking advantage of the open mike. A young Mic Mac man is reading a poem about the loss of his language, how he can feel it inside of him even though he cannot speak it. The anger in his voice is palpable,

but as the poem ends his tone changes to one of optimism, resolve. He then walks away from the microphone without another word as the audience applauds.

Rita Joe is impressed, both by his anger and his optimism. "I understand his problem. The reserve he's from doesn't speak a lot of Mic Mac."

On the Eskasoni Reserve where she is from, virtually everyone speaks Mic Mac, but Rita remembers when she didn't speak it, having been taught in English at the residential school. "I had forgotten most of my Mic Mac and when I tried to speak it they made fun of me, but when they laughed I laughed along with them, but I corrected myself."

Looking at Rita Joe I don't feel like I'm speaking with a poet. Sitting there in her sweatshirt from the National Child Welfare Conference, she doesn't fit the artsy image I've become accustomed to. It's only when she speaks that the poet emerges, and that to me means honesty.

"I just speak the truth. I saw and heard the stereotype, the negative image in history that is not written by us. I made up my mind that I was going to change that image."

Her body of work is proof she means what she says. A recipient of the Order of Canada, Rita Joe has written three books of poetry about the lives of the Mic Mac people to set the record straight. "There is no end to the stories I tell," Rita Joe says in both Mic Mac and English to her audience of seventy at the Killam library last Thursday.

She means two things when she says this. First, she feels her work is far from over, that the story of her people has not been fully told. Second, she feels she is running out of time to tell those stories. Just creeping into her sixties, her left hand trembling from Parkinson's, her words are tinged by the acceptance



Rita Joe takes time to laugh after her reading Thursday at the Killam Library. PHOTO: LESLIE FURLONG

of her mortality. "I'm just trying to touch you in a way for you to feel for me," she says, "to look at my side of the story as a native individual, not what is written about me."

Soon another poet, a white male,

makes his way to the mike. Before he reads his poem he apologizes for using the word "Indian". Afterwards I ask her about that. "I like what he said. I know what he's trying to say. I admire what he's trying to say."

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**Savoca
film fails
to impress**

by Mark Farmer

Household Saints is the story of three generations of Italian-American women in New York, and how they live their faith and family traditions.

Tracey Ullman plays Catherine Falconetti, who marries Joseph Santangelo (Vincent D'Onofrio) after her father wagers her in a pinochle game. Judith Malina plays the traditional Italian Mama-in-law, and Lili Taylor plays her granddaughter Teresa, who becomes dedicated, obsessed or deranged by Jesus depending on how you look at it.

The film plods through domestic life in America, circa 1950s, and director Nancy Savoca shows us Catherine's attempts to deal with her overbearing mother-in-law, simple husband, miscarriage and a daughter obsessed with God.

The men in the film ooze machismo (hey waddaya want? This is America in the '50s!) but they have their endearing traits — Joseph tries to be a decent father, and brother-in-law Nicky has an endearing obsession with Madame Butterfly.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 7

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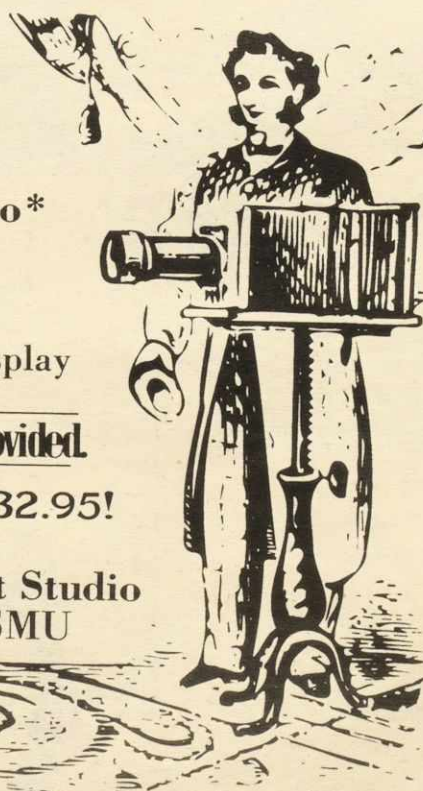
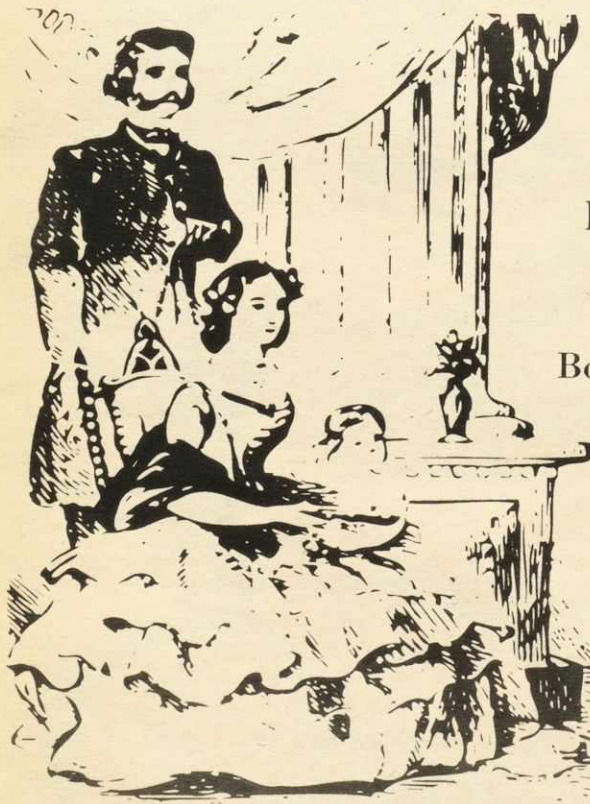
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