

Drama with teeth

By JOHN OUGHTON

The theatre Passe Muraille's "Vampyr" is one of the most powerful dramatic efforts to yet appear this season in Toronto. The play is somewhat unusual in that it is an essay in the horror genre, which is the traditional province of movie-makers. Some influence from the Peter Brooks version of "Marat-Sade" is evident in the set design and the continued debate between Father Antoine and the proselytizing vampire Paul d'Estrie.

The action of the play takes place in a convent wherein d'Estrie is imprisoned as a suspected vampire. He at first lies motionless as though transfixed by a stake while the nuns, their Mother Superior, and Father Antoine, discuss what can be done with him. Although at first confident of a speedy salvation, Father Antoine discovers that he cannot combat d'Estrie's growing power over the nuns.

The set is fantastic. It is multi-levelled so that several of the characters can be on stage at once engaged in different things without infringing on each other's dramatic space. The stage lights are placed low down to create looming shadows of the actors and the bars and planks around them. In a low, red-lit room under the main set which simultaneously suggests a convent's cellar and hell, sit three musicians, "the orchestra." They play almost continuously a subtle, eerie music which adds greatly to the atmosphere. One of the musicians is Len Udow, a fine folksinger who appeared at various York functions last year.

All of the actors turn in strong performances. Kenneth Adamson seemed to have a little difficulty in making Father Antoine as real a character as the others, but this is partially the fault of the script. Clare Coulter gives a beautiful portrayal of the Mother Superior who has faith in both God and the powers of darkness. And, Booth Savage really makes it as the vampire.

Much of the credit for the success of the production is due to Martin Kinch, the director. As a totality, "Vampyr" has few weak elements. Occasionally, music was used where absolute silence might have been more effective. The ending seemed somewhat forced: Christianity re-appearing when it has been effectively argued out of existence. Scenes such as Antoine's attempted exorcism of the dark forces, and the final orgy of the vampires are, however, flawless. Vampyr is a potent distillation of fear, violence, superstition and reminders of the type of power over people which Charles Manson is claimed to have.

It is the most impressive production that the local experimental theatres have done this year. Go to see it if possible; it's running until about Mar. 14 at Trinity Square. Artaud would have loved it, and you will too if you like having hell scared out of you. Garlic is provided, so just bring a crucifix.



Elton John album rolls well

By BRIAN PEARL

The most obvious and laudable aspect of Elton John's two albums, *Elton John* and *Tumbleweed Connection*, is the intensity all the people involved feed into the songs. Every tune receives its full measure of effort in the singing, the playing and the arranging and the songs themselves are always strong enough in melody or lyrics, or both, to stand the strain of so much concentration of talent.

This first album, *Elton John* did the introduction job it was supposed to do pretty well. Rolling Stone hailed the singer as the first superstar of the seventies and *Your Song* hit the charts with a gratifying splash while everyone was talking about *Take Me to the Pilot* and Aretha Franklin recorded *Border Song*.

Barely five months after *Elton John* arrived we see a 'new' album,

really an old one. *Tumbleweed Connection* is harder to reach than *Elton John*, there is no blatantly sympathetic song like *The Cage* to latch onto, but the effort to set your mind rolling and catch up to this freewheeling album is well worth it. The fact is that Bernie Taupin, the lyricist, is as good a writer as Jaimie Robertson of *The Band* and, even Bob Dylan at times, and he grasps images entirely and thrusts his songs right into different eras if he feels like it.

Though the lifestyles we encounter are different, the lives are like ours somehow in their passions and hopes. This historical type of song-writing is not invented here, but with *The Band's* song *The Night They Drove Old Dixie Down*. It is hardly unexpected that writers who depend on folk music for inspiration should eventually turn to history itself for the same

thing, and succeed.

The end result is some very fine music, indeed, and the promise of more and better stuff to come because Elton John (et. al.) just seems to get better. Rumour has it that the man will be here in March, sometime after Melanie, at Massey Hall.

Plays at York

Theatre FA 302 will be presenting two one-act plays, "Impromptu" and "The Still Alarm" in the newly redesigned Atkinson Lab Theatre. Performances will be held at 8:30 pm on Thursday Feb. 25 and Friday Feb. 26. Admission for both performances is free and all interested are invited to attend.

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