

The Birthday Party something to celebrate

by Ken Burke

What can you really say about a play that's just gone out of production? It's rather futile to try to get people to go to it, and just as pointless to say, "Boy, you shoulda been there!" Too bad, because if the Dalhousie Theatre Department's production of Harold Pinter's **The Birthday Party** was still playing, I'd likely say both things. The play was put on with the best spirit of amateur theatre, something Neptune Theatre direly needs, and an almost veteran professionalism. Of course, there were faults with it, but they in no way measured up to the production's strengths. Aw, hell, it was fun.

To begin with, **The Birthday Party's** not an easy play for anyone to put on, let alone a university theatre department. There has to be a fine balance between the comic and sinister aspects of the play in order for it to work. Director Alan Andrews sought this by increasing the tension as the play went on, until the last act was almost wholly dark in tone.

As the play deals with Stanley's capture by two agents of the "organization" while he is hiding out at the seaside boarding house of Meg and Petey, the

onus is on the actor playing Stanley to show the fear inherent in his character while trying to bluff his way out of the mess he's in. Unfortunately, that was the main problem with Michael Balser's performance - Stanley just didn't seem scared enough.

But as the head henchman of the "organization," Goldberg, Mark Latter was excellent. His character had to be both comic and sinister in parts, and so he was; from a preening, gold-teeth-flashing gentleman to a business-like thug, Latter was on target throughout. Michael Howell, as his associate, gave a good performance, especially in the comic scenes, lacking only a more consistent menace to his character.

Fairly dominating the play throughout (though perhaps too much) was Nora E. Sheehan as Meg, the dither-brained and mildly horny manager of the boarding house. Pinter wrote Meg as a twit supreme and Sheehan brings her to life with a performance that never sagged throughout - no matter how much Meg did. She moved about like a cross between the Bride of Frankenstein and an elderly Happy Homemaker, tottering and trudging forward, except when she sat down, her

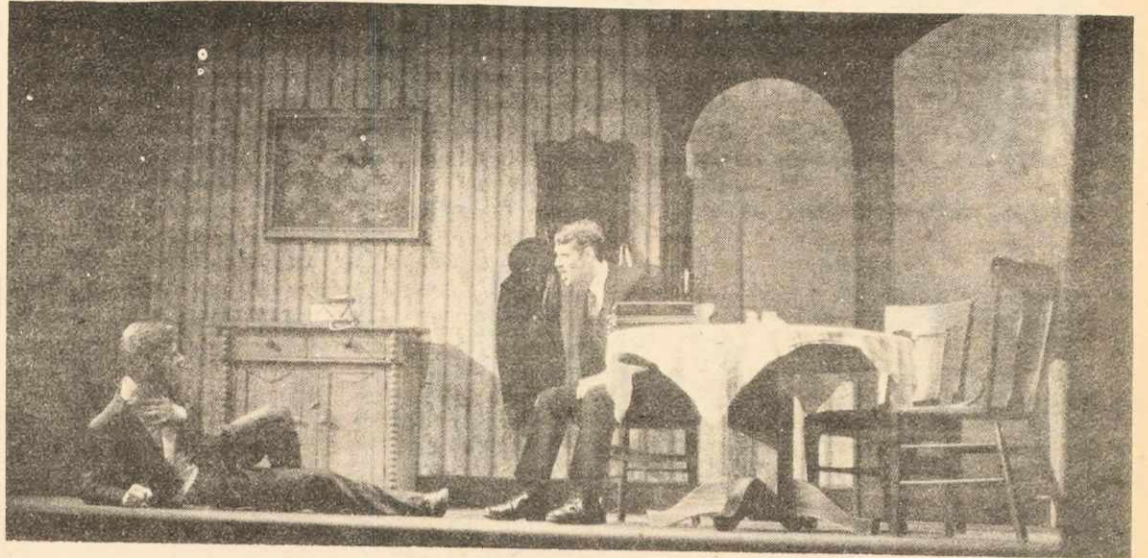


photo: Norval Balch

legs splayed out at an unnatural angle. Meg's husband, Petey, was interpreted better by Bill MacRae than I thought could be done, demonstrating the complexity of his minor role. Nancy Krista was okay as Lulu, but her final tear-filled scene was too artificial at times and stuck out too much.

Immeasurably helping the play and its effect was the magnificent set by Terrence T. Averill, scenography intern at the Theatre Department. It consisted of a huge box with the set for acts 1 & 3 on one side and

for act 2 on the other. They were all enclosed, and when the lights went out, the covering was removed to show the set for the act. The sets themselves were excellent: nothing looked out of place and everything rang true. Even more striking, the set for the second act was positioned ten or fifteen feet off the floor, heightening the effect of the box. What Averill did in his design is what Pinter does in his plays - put his characters in boxes, defined spaces, and set situations, and let us watch and speculate on what is actually

happening, as scientists might with white mice.

I was truly impressed by this production, and can't wait until the next Dal Student Production (Tennessee Williams' **The Glass Menagerie**, February 9-14). To look at this on the lowest level (money), two dollars for a ticket to a top-quality play is far better than \$8-\$12 for the safe, tried & true money-making entertainment that Neptune Theatre is pumping out this year. Maybe John Neville should have stuck with Dal - it's even better than the "Best Theatre in Canada."

Scott takes the professional gamble

by Gisele Marie Baxter

Making a record is still one of the best ways to let a large number of people know you've got music you want them to hear. Yet it's also an incredible gamble. Last week I had the chance to talk with Robert Scott, a young Nova Scotian musician who has decided to take that gamble.

Robert Scott is from Chester;

his history as a performer has been, in his own words, "sporadic up to about a year ago." However, that history has also been varied, including summer theatre in Chester, a brief stint at the College of Art, work with the Theatre Arts Guild and on "Aerial View," the first independent movie to come out of Nova Scotia, and some time with a band called Split Deci-

sion which played in Halifax and Lunenburg. By November of last year, Robert Scott was compiling his own songs for an album recorded early this year at Solar Studios and released this fall as **Note in a Bottle**.

Now Scott has left a job to concentrate on promoting the album. He manages himself, though he does have two booking agents, so much of the pro-

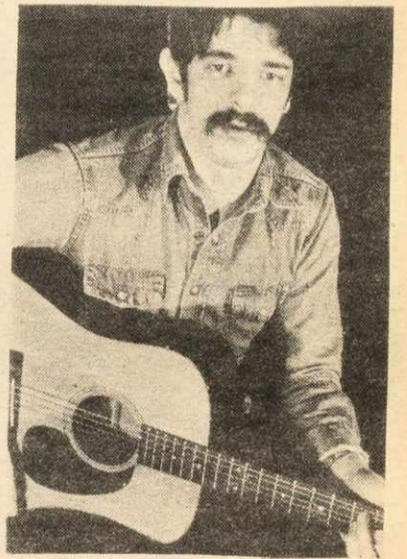
motion depends on his own initiative. He has been visiting radio stations throughout the province and did a spot on "Atlantic AM" on ATV. Of the radio stations, CHFX-FM, CHNS, CFDR and our own CKDU, as well as a number of Valley stations, all are playing the album and their response to it has been positive.

What kind of music is on **Note in a Bottle**? Scott describes it as contemporary folk, and says he was "brought up on bluegrass and folk." His chief influences have been Paul Simon and Joan Baez, though more for the music than the politics, and he keeps learning new chord progressions for the guitar; new approaches to his music. The lyrics are based on observations of life: realistic stories, personal experiences and those of friends. There are two instrumentals on the album, one inspired by images of England and Scotland, but Scott prefers songs with lyrics. **Note in a Bottle**, which is by now in all the record stores, Scott said, was produced and arranged by Gordon Tucker, who is also one of the album's musicians.

Performances, which are crucial to promoting one's music, can be difficult to come by. The major clubs are not too willing to take a chance on a fairly unknown performer, and places which are, like the Grafton Street Cafe, have to struggle for support. Yet only by performing can one grow in relationship to an audience, and learn how to deal with different types of reaction. Ideally, Robert Scott would like to play in a hall like the Rebecca Cohn, where he and a group of good musicians could

present a visually appealing show in warm and intimate surroundings.

If the Maritimes will support him, Scott would like to earn his



living here. He feels there is much talent here which goes unnoticed; people like the Ladies' Choice Bluegrass Band and Steve Rhymer, who has had songs recorded by American country singer Emmylou Harris, but is virtually unknown. Yet he's still willing to take a chance and stay here. Though he considers himself a realist, learning to be a businessman, he retains a lot of integrity and optimism.

"I feel I have a strong point of identification," he says of his music; people who have heard the album have really reacted favourably to it. It may be a business and a risk, but music is also a crucial part of Robert Scott's life, and a part he wants to share.

Atlantic Filmmakers Co-op is thriving in Halifax

by Glenn Walton

"The Atlantic Filmmaker's Co-op encourages independent filmmaking by filmmakers who are just beginning their profession," says Jim MacSwain, distribution coordinator for the Argyle Street co-op.

The Co-op was founded in 1973 by a group of local filmmakers who wanted to develop their own films and was helped by the National Film Board with production monies and access to equipment. "We are independent of the NFB," MacSwain stressed, "the Canada Council came through with a grant for the salaries of the coordinator and the distribution coordinator. The Film Co-op is unique in that it provides an education service in the form of workshops for both 8mm and 16mm filmmaking."

The Co-op is noted for its number of diverse and experimental filmmaking techniques. It has produced documentaries

such as **Rude Questions** by Doug Pope and **Island Memories** by John Brett, both of which won citations at the Atlantic Film Festival last month in Newfoundland. Examples of experimental films produced on Argyle Street are **Billy Doucette's Hornpipe** by Claire Henry, which traces the path made by a light on the end of a fiddle bow. There is also an animation section; **Fly my Spirit** by Elaine Pain and **Jabberwock** by Lulu Keating are two animated shorts made at the Co-op. The range of the 37 films made so far at the Co-op runs from 3 minutes to an hour in length.

To become a member of the Co-op one must attend two general meetings and be voted in on the third. After becoming a member one is entitled to receive the newsletter, have access to the equipment and to receive funding for productions. However, to have access to the

equipment it must be proven that the applicant can handle such expensive and delicate machinery, which is accomplished by attending in-house workshops that are usually led by experienced members.

The production budget is around \$9,000 a year so monies are limited and members' versatility on cutting costs is encouraged. Each new member is given an amount of film free with which to experiment (membership is \$75 a year). There are presently about 60 members in the Co-op and an average film of 6 minutes would cost around \$6,000, depending on the amount of film shot.

MacSwain added that there is a screening facility that seats 20 people. Any individual or group that would like to screen Co-op films can arrange this by phoning 423-8833 and speaking to the distribution coordinator. People who are interested in membership should talk to the coordinator Fran Shuebrook.