

the arts

An original Newfoundland success story

by Chris Marsh

I certainly hope you manage to see Rising Tide Theatre of Newfoundland's *Joey* during its all too short three day run at the Cohn. It was more than, to use the real Joey Smallwood's succinct phrase, "entrancing, dramatic, stirring, and all about me": it was a shining example of what a small group of people can create when they are dealing with a subject that affects them deeply and personally. *Joey* is a play that rings with sincerity.

I heard Kevin Noble, the actor who portrays Joey Smallwood, complain in an interview of how the play has been treated by so many critics as a one man show, when, in fact, it is the furthest thing possible from a one man show.

He's got a point. All six cast members, along with director Donna Butt and playwright Rick Salutin, spent six weeks collaborating on the script which follows the life of the man who "created Newfoundland", from his poor beginnings, through a stormy political career, to his post-political role as a sort of demi-god.

The proof of the success of this

collaborative approach to playwriting is a play that is accurate enough to present the real Joseph R. Smallwood, and yet entertaining enough to be enjoyed by a political ignoramus like myself, whose knowledge of Newfoundland pre-Confederation politics is about on a par with the average person's knowl-

edge of Sanskrit. It is a play that transcends its subject matter, while staying true to it at the same time.

To achieve this success, *Joey* uses what is fast surpassing cod as Newfoundland's best known export: good solid humour. You can check your Chekovian nuances at the door. Here, the acting

style is broad; the characters are saved from becoming caricatures only by the actors' sincerity. They laugh at themselves with a fierce pride all through the play, so that every self-deprecating jibe, every sou'westered buffoon, holds an insight into the courage and independence that makes Newfoundlanders unique.

It takes a top-notch cast to make this delicate balance work, but this group manages the feat. Part of the credit is, of course, due to Kevin Noble's brilliant playing of Joey; he is a charismatic ball of energy, steam-rolling his way through life.

However, all of this would have been wasted had it not been for the equal vigour of the rest of the cast, all of whom play several characters, and do so well enough that one forgets that the actor who just a few minutes ago was playing a randy outport fisherman is now playing politician John Crosbie.

Place these inspired performances on Robert Petrie and Derk Butt's flexible scenographic set, and it is easy to see why *Joey* has earned so much critical acclaim across the country.

All of this, however, should raise a nagging voice in Halifax

theatre-goers asking "Why isn't Nova Scotia producing good original material?" Why indeed? *Joey* is only unique in Newfoundland theatre in that we are getting to see it here on the mainland. Meanwhile back in St. John's there is a virtual flood of theatrical activity happening right now—plays being written by Newfoundlanders, for Newfoundlanders, about Newfoundland.

Sure, John Gray is a good playwright from Nova Scotia; but his plays do not touch the essence of Nova Scotia the way that a play like *Joey* reaches the heart of Newfoundland. Perhaps only Walter Borden's theatrical work in the Nova Scotian black community, or Robbie O'Neill's performances for the Mulgrave Road Co-op can be said to match the social awareness and originality of theatre in Newfoundland.

But what is wrong with the rest of the people involved in theatre in Halifax? By now we are all aware that the city's stages are awash with talent. Is Nova Scotia such a dull place that there is not anything worth writing about? Or is this city's theatrical community too busy scraping up a living to bother with producing original material?



Elvis Punches the Clock

by Jayn Ritchie for CKDU

Popularity on a large scale in North America for Declan McManus (alias Elvis Costello) might finally be in sight. Costello has never received widespread success here in his 6-year musical career, and this is usually attributed to his reputation for public "misconduct"; more specifically a single incident concerning himself and Stephen Stills. The press gleefully shredded Costello for such drunken uttrances as referring to Ray Charles as "a blind ignorant nigger." Costello's albums were pulled off radio playlists across America, and he received numerous death threats.

That was 1979. Costello, four years later, is still paying for the

"misunderstanding" and until the release of *Imperial Bedroom* last summer, he had not done any interviews at all (the cover-line in *Rolling Stone* that summer was "Elvis Costello Repents"). *Imperial Bedroom*, although stunningly sophisticated, was introverted and not a big seller, but it seems that *Punch the Clock*, Costello's newest album, has wise alterations that may very well make it a well-deserved knockout.

The most immediately noticeable changes are in the production and in the increased number of musicians; both add up to a very optimistic-sounding album.

The "Madness" production

team of Langer and Winstanley is coupled with the TKO Horn Section on no less than 5 of the tracks, as well as the female backing vocals of Afrodiziak. The result has been called "breezy, white-boy funk" and although it is low on atmosphere, it seems Costello has hit on the winning combination.

Before the album was simultaneously released here and in Europe, Costello had already released 3 singles in his native England: "Shipbuilding," "Pills and Soap" and "Everyday I Write the Book"—every one a hit.

The first two were released under the name "The Imposter," as well as being either written or released in record time. ("Shipbuilding" was written in ten minutes, 'Pills and Soap' was on the stands within 24 hours of being recorded in a limited edition of 15,000.)

"Shipbuilding" and "Pills and Soap" are the most powerful and political songs on the album (possibly in Costello's career). Here, lyrically (as in the rest of the album) Costello has not compromised, and still wins the "best lyricist" award.

"Shipbuilding centres around the Falklands, and "Pills and Soap" describes Margaret Thatcher's resulting cheap emotion tactics ("...ashtrays of emotion for the fag ends of the aristocracy").

Punch the Clock is definitely Costello's most commercial album in a long time, but at the same time the optimism rings true. A reliable album, although less despairing than much of his work, on *Punch the Clock* Costello still shines through with that direct, aggressive element.

Whistlestop for successful local cinema

Review by Ronald Foley Macdonald

Stations is the first major realization of a regional cinema that examines the difficulties of living in a modern technological age through a particularly Atlantic viewpoint. The picture is the result of some three years' work and will be presented during the upcoming Atlantic Film Festival.

Put together by the same people who organized the Atlantic Filmmakers Co-Op, *Stations* was financed by a variety of sources including the CFDC and the Canada Council. Technical support came from, among others, the Co-Op and the Atlantic Studio of the National Film Board.

Stations is a challenging and sometimes compelling film about a Vancouver broadcast journalist who is haunted by a decision to leave the seminary in the early sixties. The journalist, Tom Murphy (played by Mike Jones), is dissatisfied with his job and disturbed by his distance from his roots in Newfoundland. He takes an assignment covering the Via Rail transcontinental service. What follows is a strange, somewhat purgative journey to the east, ending in resignation and reconciliation.

Director William MacGillvary has used the cramped confines of the train to create an atmosphere that is both claustrophobic and, oddly enough, exhilarating. Mind you, this is no pastoral travelogue. The exhilaration comes not from sweeping vistas of natural landscapes, but rather from the actual motion of the

train.

Much of the film was shot at night (or at least in dim light) so that there is a sombre mood, broken only when random encounters with other passengers provide some comic relief.

The acting, mainly by non-professionals, is at least fairly convincing. The script infers much and explains practically nothing; sort of like a detective story with no crime. The story itself is an impressionistic recapitulation of the journalist's life.

Stations makes use of some old 8 mm home movies to gain historical perspective; indeed, the editing interspaces several time frames, back and forth, throughout the film.

The effect is a bid Godardian, with the interior monologue of the main character on the soundtrack while visual scenes flash from the present to the past to the distant past. This may confuse and irritate some people by its lack of reference. In other words, you have to figure out some things for yourself. Of course, good art is always suggestive rather than dogmatic, and great art has never been easy.

Picture Plant, which produced the picture, is a group that is singlehandedly attempting to create a regional cinema that both reflects and responds to an Atlantic Canadian consciousness. *Stations* and its predecessor, *Aerial View*, are the initial efforts in what will hopefully be a thriving intelligent local cinema.

