

Dr. John Ripley: Drama Workshop

Students offered training in drama, practical theatre

By LINDA GILLINGWATER of The Gazette Staff

"Drama taught apart from practical theatre orientation is inadequately taught." The Dalhousie Drama Workshop, available to any full or parttime student is designed to allow the average student in any faculty to participate in dramatic productions of good standard, and to encourage a greater appreciation for and participation in Community and Professional Theatre."

Briefly stated this sums up the raison d'etre of the Dalhousie Drama Workshop.

When Dr. John Ripley, director of the workshop first came in 1961 he saw a very real demand for such a venture.

The workshop was born in 1963 as an adjunct to the English 9 course (History of Drama). Before long a number of students other than those in English 9 were seeking admission. At the end of the first year, twenty students were working in the Haliburton Room at King's. Their only performance was one at the Jazz Club, — improvisation Jazz and Jazz mime.

In the spring of '64 the University officially recognized the need for such a programme and appointed Miss Susan Vallance as an assistant, working jointly for the Education and English Departments.

Because of the intensive nature of the instruction offered a minimum of three studios was required. In 1964 a building on South Street was provided to house the Drama Workshop activities. At this time Mrs. Dorothy Dickson was added to the staff teaching movement and history of dance on a purely voluntary basis. Professor Dawson took over fencing bringing a staff strength up to four.

Thus, in 1964 the Workshop provided instruction in speech, movement, acting, fencing, and history of dance. Also for the first time members of city amateur companies were accepted. Since there is no formal training available east of Montreal "we simply had to create the places," Dr. Ripley felt that the University had a responsibility to co-operate with all drama groups and thus assist the cultural development of the community.

In Sept. of '64 a credit course in Child Drama was offered by

Miss Vallance. An experiment was set up in which about 100 city school children took part. This was Not a children's theatre; no parts were memorized; no scripts were used. Rather it was an experiment in developing the creative part in the child's personality, imaginative thinking, and movement. In order to counteract the passive effects of T.V., encouragement was given to active participation.

Nov. 18, 1964 marked the first big undertaking for the Workshop — Romeo and Juliet. A replica of an Elizabethan stage was erected in the gym. Dr. Ripley felt it imperative that students in the area see Shakespeare on the kind of stage for which he wrote. In terms of box office it was a great success and represented the first performance of Shakespeare on campus for many years.

Because students were unlikely to see performance of the Coventry Nativity Play elsewhere, it was organized by Dr. Ripley and presented in the Basilica 17 December as part of the Basilica Concert Series and played for a week in Churches in the Halifax-Dartmouth area.

Throughout the winter the Workshop lent assistance to groups in the area who asked for it (i.e. lectures, demonstrations, production assistance, etc.)

In July 1965, the university, and Neptune theatre in co-operation with the Canada Council sponsored a theatre conference and workshop. It was open to all ages and interests and attracted people as far away as Quebec. Attendance was limited to 50 in order that a personal contact with the leaders could be maintained.



DR. JOHN RIPLEY

Formal lectures and attendance at performances were balanced by coffee discussion groups and workshops in the afternoon. Featured lecturer was internationally famous playwright, J.B. Priestley.

This year the staff is composed of eight members. Peter Donkin, Radio Drama Director of the C.B.C. will offer training in basic radio acting. Two closed circuit radio plays will be presented by his students.

Professor Lionel Lawrence, a doctoral candidate from the University of Illinois, will teach acting. Having obtained his undergraduate training from Queens he went to Illinois. While there he directed, acted, and taught verbal communications as well as pursuing extensive academic courses.

One of his more ambitious projects was the direction of Underworld, in New York, the score of which was written by "one of the most promising young composers in North America today" according to Professor Lawrence.

The entire play covered a period of only 14 minutes. Because of the short time span every movement and sound was divided into seconds. The script consisted of monosyllables, each of which was presented by the four actors in groups covering a specific number of seconds. The varying intonations of the basic monosyllables, combined with music composed partly by computers, and the choreography were designed to give the play its meaning.

Its reception? Professor Lawrence said "the place was literally up for grabs." Even the critics didn't know quite what to do with it; they restricted themselves to describing the play. Comment was reserved because "they had no standard with which to compare it."

Miss Audrey Stanley, former head of the Drama Dept. at City of Birmingham Training College, who is described by Dr. Ripley as "one of the very best qualified theatre people in the East, having had wide experience in Great Britain acting, theatre adminis-

tration, and film-making" will teach speech and child drama.

This year's first production, Julius Caesar, has already been cast, and rehearsals are now underway. To be staged in the university gymnasium, the play will run from Nov. 9 to 13 inclusive.

Once Professor Lawrence has oriented himself to the campus and its possibilities he will choose and direct the second production of the Workshop to be presented in the spring.

When asked about the future Dr. Ripley said: "We are going to grow and have to grow." Drama programmes in the Maritimes are lagging far behind those of the rest of Canada and the U.S. A number of universities recognized some years ago the importance of a theatre in the cultural life of their respective areas and set up a degree programme in Drama. The University of British Columbia and the University of Alberta were among the first in the field.

Given the present framework of the Workshop it is absolutely impossible according to Dr. Ripley to implement professional drama courses. To attain a standard of competence a minimum of three years intensive technical training is required. This would preclude the broad humanities background which is essential to the University-educated person. However, the training now offered in the Workshop will be of considerable help to those going on to professional schools or those engaged in High School drama work.

Drama is as legitimate a subject for credit courses as any of the traditional disciplines Ripley said. Within the next few years demand for drama credit courses will grow Dr. Ripley feels.

However, if and when degree programmes are implemented those who are unable to take the credit programme should be kept in mind; they should have some contact with theatre arts on a non-credit basis if they wish.



SACK RACE AT FALL FESTIVAL

He felt expansion should take place in two directions: 1) toward credit courses at both undergraduate and graduate levels. 2) increasing involvement in community theatre projects.

Professor Lionel Lawrence, a newcomer to the Workshop said that Dr. Ripley "has laid the foundations for what promises to be an exciting programme." You the student, are invited to visit the Drama Workshop, 6188 South Street, (opposite the Dal Rink) Dr. Ripley will discuss drama participation with all interested students.



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MAID MARION

Take an umbrella, they said, they being my mother and friends. And rubber boots. It rains all the time in Halifax.

I scorned their warnings as being an unworthy manifestation of the mate Western suspicion and discrediting on principle of anything east of Winnipeg.

They clucked over my refusal to take them seriously. I did agree that some rain and fog might appear but that the quantity would probably not be as great as rumours suggested.

What I didn't know, definitely hurt me. It's not that I dislike fog or rain. The misty, white mornings give one the feeling of infiniteness even in the confinement of strange, impenetrable walls.

However, I hadn't counted on wet shoes that don't dry overnight, on frizzy hair that straggles limply over one's eyes, or on torrents of bullet-sized raindrops that make you feel as if you're under a shower with a small tornado stirring things up to make life interesting.

The cold settles into your bones, defying the comfort of warm slippers and three sweaters.

Oh, how I long for the dry air of Edmonton where it rains and then stops and then the sun shines for a few more weeks. Oh, for the comparatively flat campus where you don't have to trudge up and down hills just to get to class and you don't have to walk miles to the Forrest building when you've only got one hour to get through that phenomenal lunch line-up at Shirreff Hall.

But please don't misunderstand me. Dalhousie is a wonderful university, despite its rather unfortunate climatic situation.

The courses I'm taking are absorbing and challenging, the girls in residence and other students on campus have been very friendly and kind. The campus itself is probably one of the most beautiful and impressive in Canada, due mostly to the uniform building materials and the lovely trees.

And the Nova Scotia names are fascinating — Antigonish or Halifax itself are good examples. But perhaps Edmonton and Inuvik sound equally strange to the Eastern ear.

Three weeks at Dal have really made me a Dalhousie student, although of course I still use the University of Alberta for purposes of identification. And when I return to convocate at U of A this spring, I'll probably be nauseatingly full of anecdotes about that Eastern Utopia where I spent a glorious year.

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For further particulars please call: **The Secretary Dalhousie Drama Workshop** 6188 South Street, opp. the rink; Phone 429-1420.



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