

The rich go to learn about poverty

Review by Michaleen Marte

Picture this scenario. Women in furs and thin-strapped shoes baring legs through the newest side-slits in their gowns. Their husbands guide them from the cold of outside in their finest suits and self-assured smiles. They have reached the theatre to meet acquaintances and spend an evening's entertainment. But carefully watch the look of shock and puzzlement that enters their faces as they near the coat check. The building shakes from a strange and violent pounding from upstairs.

The pounding was coming from the White Braid Society who were performing upstairs. The wailing, dancing and beating of drums was what had brought the alarmed reaction from the informed theatre patrons, until they responded with praise and admiration. The performance of the White Braid Society was a prelude to what was yet to come on stage.

The Citadel's Shocter Theatre has produced George Ryga's small Canadian classic *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe*. The play is now over a decade old, with a message as current as today's news. It concerns the eternal fate of the Canadian native in the white society. It examines a kind of life-cycle of the native once he enters the urban environment, which he may or may not follow until the end. Optimism, disillusion, alienation, indifference, despair and death are the stages that pattern this fate. Ryga has presented a comprehensive view of the state of the native in our contemporary nation.

In this *Rita Joe* is the central character through which this pattern of fate is examined. Basically the story is told from the point of her trial where she is charged with common vagrancy and soliciting. In her defense *Rita Joe* indulges in a collection of memories, dreams and visions that expose a personal history, a history of a family, a lover, a community and an entire culture.

It would seem obvious that the part of *Rita Joe* carries an enormous weight in the drama. The actor in the part must be effective in order for the play to succeed. *Rita Joe* is the sole voice through which a total song of joy and anguish should reverberate.

The choice of Susan Andre is perhaps where the play fails to be great, rather than being merely good. In saying this it is not easy to state why. Andre is energetic and quite ambitious in her role, so that she nearly writhes with the feeling that rush through her. Writhes in this case is not an overt description. At times her



Photo Shirley Glew

movements are awkward and exaggerated beyond what is necessary. Most importantly her speech is delivered in a strange and remote form. Instead of being delivered with power and poetry it often is a strain to listen to. Andre's voice is but a hollow means to real passion.

John Hamelin as Jamie Paul is also good, but somewhat overeager. He makes a convincing performance of an Indian whose frustrations develop into rebelliousness. Jamie Paul is the critic of the failings in both the white and Indian cultures. Jamie Paul is also the most resilient character, who seems to always return with new optimism in the face of all problems. His interactions with Mr. Homer of the Native Centre, played by Wally McSween, help to pinpoint the attitudes of the white race. The social worker, the judge and the priest all provide links of understanding between the two groups. But each one is characterized by personal defences that help to maintain an invisible boundary. The rest of the white race are as black as day. They are the villains that make the natives their victims.

The redeeming character in all of this is *Rita Joe*'s father, David Joe. John Kauffman is outstanding in his portrayal of David Joe, a member of the old generation whose submission to the white race creates conflict for the younger generation. Kauffman provides many moving speeches with a sense of contentment and quiet dignity. One certainly reminded of Chief Dan George, who immortalized the part some years ago. But Kauffman stands up very well against some stiff competition, that few could attempt to surpass.

In the program there is a brief message written by Chief Dan George. He states that the play, *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe*, has helped playgoers to understand what the native people have suffered, and are suffering. He concludes that this message is true, and that it should be heard by all. I have no doubts that the message is true. What bothers me is that it has to be seen on the stage before people can "understand" the situation of the native culture. Just outside the walls of our Citadel Theatre are people who have lived the story and perhaps in many ways could tell it better.



STUDENTS' UNION BOARDS

ADMINISTRATION BOARD

Requires 4 undergraduate students to sit as student-at-large members.

DUTIES

- consider budget recommendations prior to
- hear grant applications from social clubs, athletic and departmental clubs.
- select members of the Discipline, Interpretation and Enforcement (D.I.E.) Board.
- and other matters as outlined in By-Law 2100 of the Students' Union Constitution and By-Laws.

MEETS:

- every 2 weeks.

BUILDING SERVICES BOARD

Requires 4 undergraduate students to act as student-at-large members.

DUTIES:

- make recommendations concerning building policies and services of the Students' Union.
- allocate space in accordance with the Building Policy.
- administer individuals, groups, clubs and other organizations with respect to Building Policy.
- represent Students' Union management in the administration of Students' Union retail outlets.
- and other duties as outlined in By-Law 2700 of the Students' Union Construction and By-Laws.

MEETS:

- every 2 weeks.

EXTERNAL AFFAIRS BOARD

Requires 5 undergraduate students to act as student-at-large members.

DUTIES:

- make recommendations to Students' Council regarding political issues.
- consider financial assistance to political clubs, religious clubs, and public service organizations.
- handle media coverage of non-political student activities on and off campus.
- and other duties as outlined in By-Law 2800 of the Students' Union Constitution and By-Laws.

MEETS:

- every 2 weeks.

ACADEMIC AFFAIRS BOARD

Requires 5 undergraduate students to act as student-at-large members.

DUTIES:

- make recommendations to Students' Council on academic relations and affairs.
- consider financial assistance requests from Faculty Associations.
- promote co-operation and co-ordination with Faculty Associations.
- assist Vice-President (Academic) with implementation of Students' Union Policy.
- and other duties as outlined in By-Law 2600 of the Students' Union Constitution and By-Laws.

MEETS:

- every 2 weeks.

TERMS OF POSITIONS — 15 April 1979 to 31 March 1980
DEADLINE FOR APPLICATIONS — Monday, 9 April 1979, 4:00 p.m.

INFORMATION AND APPLICATIONS — Contact the Students' Union Executive Offices, Room 259 SUB or phone 432-4236.

YOUR STUDENTS' UNION
 WORKING FOR YOU