

News of the arts

Northern tragedy TV drama

The Dawson Patrol, a recent Canadian Broadcasting Corporation television production, dramatizes the loss of a mission in the Canadian North, almost 70 years ago. Four men of the North West Mounted Police, led by Inspector Francis Fitzgerald, left Fort McPherson in the Northwest Territories on December 21, 1910 to travel by dog-sled and snowshoe to Dawson City in the Yukon, 200 miles away. Sixty-five days later, the expedition ended in death by starvation and exposure.

The story, a familiar one in the annals of the Mounted Police, was recreated some years ago by Radio-Canada, the French network of the CBC, in co-operation with ORTF, the radio-television organization of France. The new 90-minute English-language documentary was produced by Peter Kelly and researched by George R. Robertson, who based his script on Inspector Fitzgerald's diary and on police records. Robertson also plays the part of Fitzgerald in the film.

Filming took place near Dawson last winter, under similar weather conditions the Dawson patrol must have experienced. One night, during the filming, an actor fell through the ice, chest deep. In the 35-degree below zero temperature, he was lucky to survive. A similar mishap befell one of the real patrolmen.

In 1910, Fort McPherson was an isolated northern outpost. The telegraph-line ended at Dawson. Inspector Fitzgerald had convinced the NWMP Commissioner that the yearly patrol carrying mail and dispatches should reverse its usual route and start from Fort McPherson. It was a journey that had been accomplished numerous times from the opposite direction. So confident was the Inspector, that he determined to beat the previous time of 21 days between outposts. Fitzgerald decided, against expert advice, to take an ex-NWMP constable as his guide rather than one of the regular Indian guides. To travel light and fast, he cut his food supplies to the minimum. His only map had been hastily sketched by a trapper and contained little detail. These factors, together with one of the coldest Januarys on record, combined to put Fitzgerald and his men through the agonies of cold and eventual starvation. The patrol, which became lost,



*Tim Henry (left) as Constable George Kinney and Neil Dainard as Constable Richard Taylor (of the Royal North West Mounted Police), in one of the tragic moments from *The Dawson**

was forced to turn back. The circuit travelled covered nearly 600 miles instead of the 200 that were planned. Of the four men on the original expedition,

Patrol, telecast on CBC-TV, on March 25. Peter Kelly's dramatic production is based on the true story of four men who challenged the frozen North...and lost.

Fitzgerald was the last to succumb. His final diary entry was made on February 5, 1911. He was found frozen to death just 26 miles from safety.

Young People's Theatre Centre for the Performing Arts

Young People's Theatre for the Performing Arts (YPT) has shown such a large rate of growth (from 150 performances to total audiences of 39,000 in 1966 to 1,200 performances to audiences of 400,000 in 1975), that in September 1977, YPT will move into its own building, Young People's Theatre Centre for the Performing Arts.

This Centre, the first of its kind in Canada, will be located in a historic old building at the corner of Front and Frederick Streets in Toronto. Renovation and restoration work has begun and will continue throughout the first half of 1977. The facilities will consist of a 350-seat theatre, a 65-seat rehearsal hall, a film workshop, a "green room", a lobby for art shows and performances, a restaurant, and workrooms for carpentry, costumes, painting and photography.

In the main theatre, which will have moveable seating and a convertible stage, YPT will present plays, musicals, children's opera, ballet, modern

dance, mime, cabaret theatre, films, chamber orchestra concerts, jazz and folk groups, and shows by internationally-known artists.

The rehearsal hall, in addition to providing rehearsal space, will be used for experimental productions, video-



*Rick Zimmerman plays Joey in YPT's production, *Joey the Clown*.*