

# Gustaffson reads delightful poems

by Margot Griffiths

Last Wednesday, Canadian poet Ralph Gustaffson gave a reading of his work in the Dalhousie Arts Centre. A widely-acclaimed and gifted poet, Gustaffson won the 1974 Governor General's award for his volume of poetry entitled **Fire On Stone**.

After a warm introduction by Dr. James Gray, the poet began the reading with "The Old Moscow Woman", a poem written during a visit to Russia. Through the noble character of the old woman, who "sweeps streets that will always be dirty", the poet effectively contemplates man in an urban environment.

The next selection, "Beastuary," dealt with man's 'inhuman' actions towards his fellowman, portraying animals in a more favourable light, because of their unpretentious and tolerant nature.

"A Poem For The New Year" was a satire on man's self-supposed superiority to everything in the universe, even to God. Man the poem says, has "cosmic leanings". "We tell Him". Another theological poem, "The Remarkable Heavens", dealt with the same theme, picturing man as a part of the natural process.

In portraying Cousteau's epic quest for the mythical Atlantis, "Mid-Atlantic" il-

lustrates man in dauntless pursuit of himself. But if man is doomed, says Gustaffson, "At Least He Perceives Himself." In this poem, man contemplates the profundities of the universe, and in a flash of sudden insight, realises that he is merely watching birds, reducing his glorified philosophical revelations to a simple physical reality.

"Flight Into Darkness," portayed those rare living moments in which a contradiction to unhappiness is possible.

"Centennial For Einstein" illustrated the great scientist's perception of the orderly harmony that exists in the

universe.

The next selection, "Out of Chaos His Starry Structures," pictured the creative artist molding beautiful forms from wild, undisciplined surfaces.

"A Ramble On Intimacy" contemplated creation versus the 'big bang' origin of the universe, stating man's need for mythological explanations, which seem more personal than scientific rationalizations.

The next sequence of poems, which included 'Up the Road' and 'Country Walking', placed man in a winter landscape, reveling in the glory of the natural world.

The final selection was a spiral poem in three move-

ments. The first pictured the indignities to which man is subjected, depicting Chekov's body shipped "in a crate labelled oysters", juxtaposed with the more optimistic images of geraniums and freshly washed linen. The second pictured the dedication of men engaged in creative endeavours, while the third brought in a note of hope, describing man in his own backyard.

Not only is Ralph Gustaffson a gifted poet and reader, but his natural rapport with the audience and his between-poem anecdotes which are rare at such occasions, contributed to a delightful evening for all in attendance.

## Mummenschanz is talented mime company

by donalee moulton

Mummenschanz means, among other things, innovative mime at its best. The three member group appeared last week at the Rebecca Cohn for its second consecutive standing ovation this year.

Mime is traditionally thought of as acting without words: interpretive movements portray meaning. To Mummenschanz, however, this is a very narrow definition. The first half of their show consists of foam rubber shapes that they manipulate into recognizable forms starting with the single cell and ending with man. In between there's a delightfully real camel, an unreal clam (along the lines of Kermit, only with

a better sense of humor), a dinosaur that is not dangerous. At no time does the audience see any member of the troupe; they are completely covered in costume.

This changes in the second act when Mummenschanz, through with the biological evolution of man, turns to his emotional growth (or lack of it).

And as the traditional mime uses mask, so does Mummenschanz but totally untraditional masks, of course. One toilet paper face and one note pad mask are cleverly used to depict the stereotyped man/woman courtship and the competition between men. The only part of the show that reminded one that Mummens-

schanz was here last year was the rubber pudgy faces, which can be twisted into impossible shapes, just as we manage to mask our own emotions.

The first half of Mummenschanz 1979 remains vivid, the second act less so, primarily because there was much more audience involvement in the first act: it was fun to guess what creature was now being formed.

The last half contained more of the contrived; the meaning was clear but the simplicity, and appeal, of the first act was lost.

Nonetheless, this Swiss mime troupe remains unequalled in the Rebecca Cohn.

Here's hoping they'll be back next year.



## Bikel a 'real folk singer'

by donalee moulton

Jewish sheepherding songs, Scottish drinking tunes, American war ballads, Spanish love serenades. These are only a few of Theodore Bikel's collection of songs that he brought to the Cohn last week. Billed as a folk singer—one of the world's best—Bikel is more correctly labled a folk musician. Not only does he sing in over seven languages, he plays the harmonica, whistles like a lute, calls Spanish birds and turns his guitar into drumbeats and human footsteps.

Originally from Israel, Bikel returned in 1973 to play to soldiers and civilians embroiled in the Golan Heights dispute. Often giving over 20 mini concerts a day Bikel referred to his guitar as his only weapon, "at least the only one I care to have". Last week he temporarily recreated the despair that war caused. Regrettably this part of his performance was the least

memorable. His high lilted love songs and rollicking drinking tunes (even his seafaring shantys, which for a landlubber aren't bad) stand on him more naturally and easily involve his audience.

What is most outstanding about Bikel's performance is Bikel himself. At all times he has a rapport with the audience. His stories / translations are funny, yet truthful.

You feel like you're sitting aound a friend's living room. Perhaps this is why Bikel's one serious injection fails; the audience becomes uncomfortable, Bikel becomes a stranger.

Today singers like Dan Hill are given the lable "Folk singer" but Bikel refutes this new definition and stands as a reminder of what a folk singer once was, and, in a few rare but entertaining cases, still is.



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