



Dalhousie students take centre stage

BY JOHN CULLEN

This year's Shakespeare by the Sea cast could very well be a cheerleading squad for the Dalhousie Theatre Department. The popular summer acting company, performing the Bard's finest in the outdoor setting of Point Pleasant Park, contains 14 out of 18 cast members who attend, or have graduated from Dalhousie.

Although Patrick Christopher, Artistic Director and founding member of the company, is also the head of the acting department at Dalhousie, these members were no shoe-ins. The criteria involves much more than just being a Dalhousie student.

"[You need] commitment, devotion, and a willingness to work. But [it is] more than that; it's willing to do whatever you have to do to keep the company surviving," said David Cox (Donblain, First

Witch), a third year student from Ryerson Theatre school in Toronto. "We have to do all the promotional stuff ourselves, we are a 'Yes' company."

The company is a not-for-profit organization that relies on its audience for funding.

"We get some corporate funding, some private donors, but most [revenue] comes from our audience and the site specific performance, *The Martello Tower MacBeth*," said Christopher.

At \$25 a ticket, *MacBeth* is not cheap, but the performance is full of enough thrills to make the price justifiable. Christopher has taken some

liberties with the text and created an original adaptation. The production can only be described as highly ambitious; with the role of the Three Witches completely over-hauled, and a supremely

dominant *Lady MacBeth* (Irene Poole) who adds just the right amount of erotic flair to her role. The audience, limited to a paltry 100, wanders through Point Pleasant Park while the ac-



tion takes place around them. The Martello Tower, a 1600's fortress in the middle of the park, is the base for the performance and offers an eerie setting for the indoor scenes of the play. Where the performance decidedly wins the au-

dience though, is outside. Brilliantly staged against a backdrop of trees, ocean and sky, *MacBeth* (one of Shakespeare's moodiest plays) receives the treatment it deserves. Some of the scenes are down right creepy — especially those involving the witches and *MacBeth*'s visions.

The performance is extremely physical; for actors and audience alike. It is a three and a half hour event which requires the audience to move swiftly up and down hills in the dark. The actors must do the same even faster, and still remain in character. It is quite a marvel how smoothly the production runs.

Shakespeare by the Sea has not had the easiest ride since its inception in 1994. The heat wave which left Haligonians without rain for a month also closed Point Pleasant Park. Performances of *Romeo and Juliet* and *As You Like It* were played in the

lower parking lot, instead of the battery. The change affected audience turn-out and cast morale. But Jody Stevens (Second Witch, Doctor) a fourth year Theatre major at Dalhousie, prefers to look at it from another perspective.

"It's amazing, because I think everybody in this company is so creative that we blocked [ed. note: blocking is theatre talk for rehearsing the movements of the actors] the whole change in two hours. I mean, yes, we were in the parking lot, and yeah we could hear the freight train, but it came down to your scene partner. We had to tell the same story, but in a different atmosphere [in the parking lot]. We relied on eye contact and our partners to tell the story."

For more information on tickets and performances, call *Shakespeare by the Sea* at 422-0295. The Martello Tower *MacBeth* plays until Sept. 21.

The First Lesson

BY NATALIE MACLELLAN

Eugene Ionesco's *The Lesson* kicks off the 1997-98 Dalhousie theatre season this week. It is the first Independent Student Production of the school year, having been put together over the summer months in order to be ready before classes resumed.

"[We prepared during the summer] so our lesson would be first," said director Shahin Sayadi, a third year Theatre Student. This is the second ISP for Sayadi, who directed *Miss Julie* last spring.

"He directs with an invisible hand," said cast member Neal Morgan. "You feel like you're doing it yourself, then you realize that he's wanted it like this all along."

Eugene Ionesco wrote more than twenty plays and was one of the most well known writers of absurdist theatre. He was famous for plays which are all at once

dramatic, hysterical, and profound. *The Lesson* follows suit nicely.

The story revolves around a pupil, played by Jocelyn Murphy, who visits the home

"WE ARE CREATING OUR OWN LITTLE WORLD FOR US TO ENJOY."

of her professor, played by Morgan, for a lesson. The lesson begins well, but surprising elements of each personality soon bring a change in the atmosphere. Also present in the house is the maid, played by Ben Smith. The three characters become engaged in a constant and often ridiculous struggle for power, leaving a viewer both confused and enchanted.

The set is minimal, but more than adequate. A live DJ is present on stage at all times, and the music, along with interesting plays on voices, is relied upon to set the mood.

"What we are doing here," said cast member Greg Richardson, "is creating for ourselves. We're not concerned necessarily with the audience. We're doing it because we love to do it. We're creating our own world that we can enjoy."

"The evolution of the play itself — everyone has been a part of it, and it's very... therapeutic," added Morgan.

If *The Lesson* has any faults, they are in the dialogue. We'll be hearing the droning voices of our professors soon enough, so do we want to hear them in a theatre as well?

There is, however, an ironic hilarity in listening to the professor's attempt to drill his pupil with ludicrously abstract ideas that "[can] only [be perceived] after very long study, with a great deal of trouble and after the broadest experience..." Who hasn't thought that during an early morning class?



Non-drinking

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manent menu. And, get ready for this, with the presentation of this article you can get a free dessert with any entree ordered!

I guess the message in all of this is that no one should feel compelled to drink. Mind you, most of these establishments either are, or located next to, places that serve alcohol. Admittedly the pressure is everywhere. But if you're a health-minded per-

son who wishes to partake in other activities, feel free. Hey, it's university! Have some fun for once!

**Write for the Gazette,
it's good for you!
(not really in any
homeopathic way)
It builds character,
and all those things
your parents want
you to have.**