

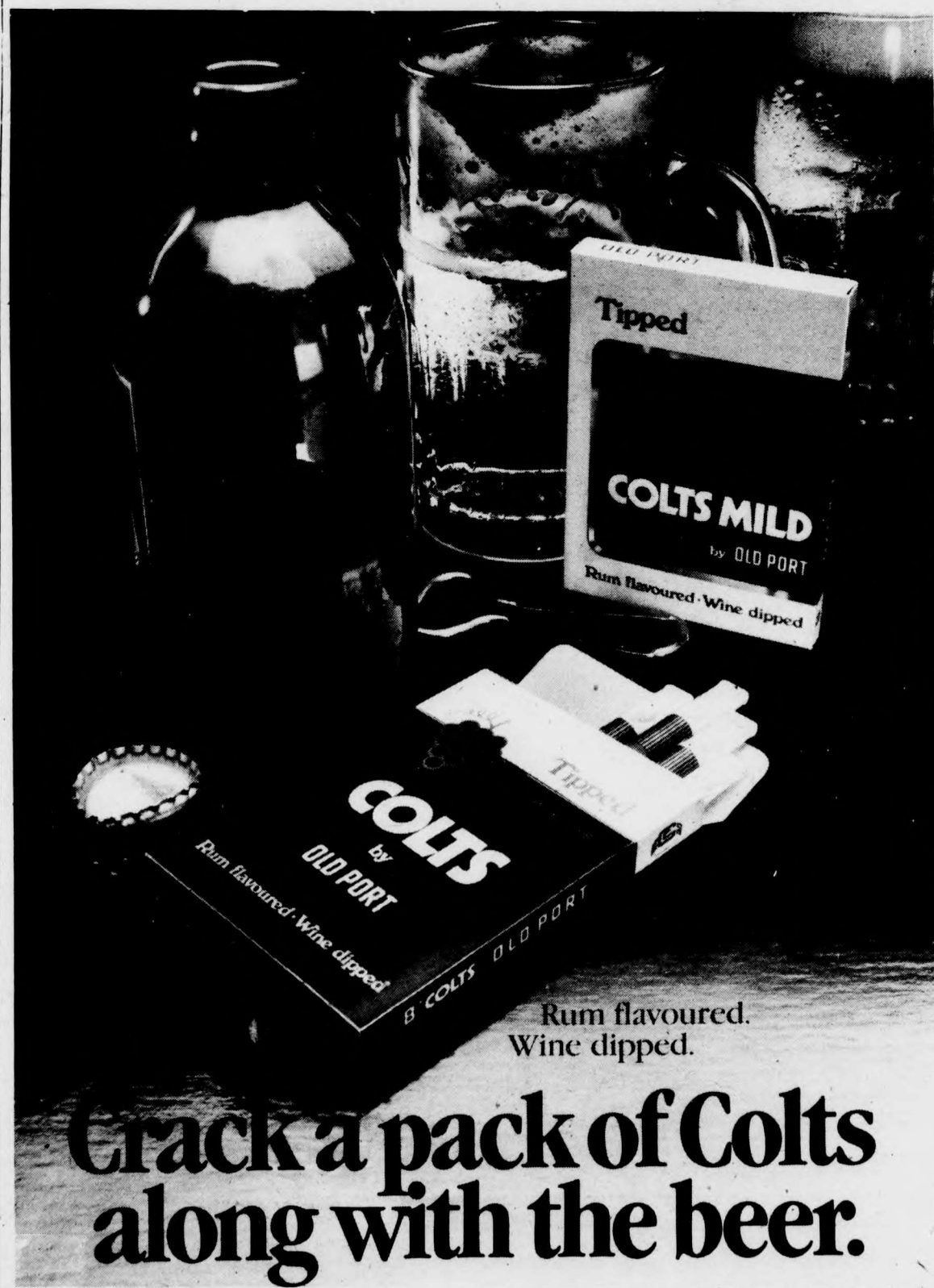


4749 Keele St. 665-1456
right across from York University

March 12th — GODDO

March 13th — Gus
March 14th — Rick Santer.
(Tribute to Led Zeppelin)
March 16th — Wet T-Shirt
March 17th — Ladies Night
March 18th — Blues Night

For the best in Rock and Roll



Rum flavoured.
Wine dipped.

Crack a pack of Colts along with the beer.

Happy End Puppet racket

Lloyd Wasser

Shortly after the success of *Threepenny Opera* in 1928, Bertolt Brecht premiered a new work, *Happy End*, to an anticipatory Berlin audience, with disastrous results. Written with assistance from Brecht's secretary, Elisabeth Hauptmann, and featuring music by Kurt Weill, *Happy End* was a dismal failure and closed after only one night. The opening night performance could hardly be completed because of the mocking laughter, hissing and noisy slamming of doors by the outraged audience. It was one of Berlin's—and Brecht's—worst theatre scandals.

After a wait of over 50 years, *Happy End* came back to life recently at the Tarragon Theatre. The opening night premiere saw no hissing, little or no mocking laughter, and a distinct lack of slamming doors. Instead, Tarragon audiences were treated to an entertaining and interesting evening of theatre.



This musical comedy tells the story of Hallelujah Lil, a Salvation Army girl who becomes romantically entangled with dangerous Chicago gangster Bill Cracker, while attempting to save his neck from a gang of racketeers led by a mysterious woman known only as "the Fly". The play, which takes place in the Chicago of the 1920's, is rich in colour and style. However, it's easy to understand why this production failed in Berlin and has rarely been revived since. The fault lies with the play itself, for this tale of Chicago gangsters and girls is an unoriginal and less-than-exciting story, lacking in any real wit or intelligence. It has none of the usual Brechtian touches to it, and certainly none of the political or

social themes Brecht utilized in his other works. Basically, *Happy End* is an odd mixture of *Guys and Dolls* and *Public Enemy Number One*.

Bill Glassco, Artistic Director of the Tarragon, realizing the script wouldn't hold up in production, joined forces with Felix Mirbt. The latter created a barrage of three-and-a-half foot tall puppets to take the place of actors, and the technique works wonderfully. The puppets practically ooze personality, from the sad, doe-eyed expression of Hallelujah Lil to the comic antics of Doctor Nakamura (a one-armed Chinese Nazi in the tradition of Lionel Atwill). The puppets play their parts to near perfection and are manipulated with great skill and deftness of hand by three on-stage puppeteers.

Aside from the puppeteers, other humans also stalk the tiny stage. Four vampy singers share the spotlight and sing the Weill tunes, as well as being the puppets' voices during the show. A pianist sits in the middle of the stage, providing accompaniment to the musical antics.

In addition to making the play more interesting, the puppets also help to distance the audience from the action. This technique, known as 'Verfremdungseffekt', is a device, which, by bringing all the theatrical devices, sound effects, music and other ingredients up on stage, constantly reminds the audience that they're watching a play, preventing them from getting too caught up in the action, and missing the work's message.

The 'Verfremdungseffekt' works extremely well here, so it's indeed unfortunate that *Happy End* contains no message of consequence to the viewer.

The music is at times, the best part of the production, truly bringing the play to life. Numbers like "Surabaya Johnny", "The Bilboa Song" and "The Sailors' Tango" managed to capture the mood and emotions of the era.

This production of *Happy End* is unique, and therefore well worth seeing. All the elements, including the puppets, the lighting, sets, and music are first rate. So take a trip down to the Tarragon Theatre, 30 Bridgman Avenue, for a night of innovative theatrical magic. Until March 21st.

A whole lotta Shakes

Andrew C. Rowsome

Only the last moment of last week's production of *Shakes* at Mac Hall was disappointing: a rousing version of "On Broadway" treated bitter-sweetly. Too bad, because with a bit more energy and confidence this immensely talented group could have been challenging Broadway rather than masochistically dreading and desiring it.

This was in direct contrast to the way an earlier version of "Fame" worked. Putting the number in the ironical context of a tap-dance class composed of varying degrees of ability gave the dismal tune a badly-needed and sharply satirical edge.

The engaging script (by Janet Sears) is best when dissecting the twin evils (virtues?) of love and fame in the Shakespearean context—the balcony scene snaps into life—and at its worst when squeezing tired laughs out of theatre department in-jokes. The script is good enough to stand on its own without them. Again it took nerve to tackle Shakespeare in a novel way and skill to succeed.

A stand-out comic turn by Walter Villa holds the show

together through an awkward narrated dream-sequence. His lampoon of an entire generation of directors is pointed, while remaining fresh. Deborah Tompkins nearly stops the show with an over-heated vocal while Valeria A. Sipos sizzles in a more visual way.

Realistic sparks do fly between the romantic interests, Antonella Loras and Stuart Hughes, but it is their inclusion in a well-staged scene that gives the love story its poignancy. And a colourful scene it is—with some impressive dancing that leads to my favourite moment: Darlene Harrison steals a dance number from under the most of some obviously more trained dancers. Her wonderfully mobile face laughs, pouts and shifts at breakneck speed as she falls into the splits and beams—succeeding for one brief second in directly sharing the joy of accomplishing something surprising and difficult.

If the talents that went into *Shakes* were to give themselves a bit more credit I think they would discover that the tragedy of "On Broadway" might not be the only aspect they need aspire to.