

Arts

A "Special Occasion" to start the new year

by **Maven Gates**

Neptune Theatre opened the new year with Bernard Slade's **Special Occasions** and the title could not be more appropriate.

For a start, John Neville is back as Michael Ruskin after directing and co-starring with Liv Ullmann during the recent Broadway run of Ibsen's **Ghosts**. As extra insurance (or assurance) that the occasion be truly special, Susan Wright has again made her way to Halifax, to portray Amy Ruskin and to provide a suitably powerful counterbalance to Mr. Neville's performance. She prevents this two-person play from tumbling to one side as last year's offering of Coward's **Private Lives** did;

instead, the pair rise and fall together, match each other stroke for stroke, and basically sustain the solid, excellent performance that one expects in first-rate professional theatre.

The material is good. Bernard Slade based **Special Occasions** upon his wife's observation that "two people while together found it impossible to modify their personalities but would sometimes change drastically with a new mate and, ironically, would frequently become the person their first partner had always wanted them to be". The humour is bright and surprisingly spontaneous, although the actors are as responsible for the manifestation of this quality as is the author.

A warning is in order, however. Slade himself confessed that he "had never actually met a divorced couple who had managed to reframe their relationship in a way that allowed them to retain their common history along with a mutual affection". Thus he points out that his play "is not meant to be about divorce in general but rather the chart of a relationship between two specific people". This is fine if you, like Slade and Harold Clurman, believe that "the Theatre does not necessarily have to be what life is but what it should be".

Special Occasions will be on tour in the Maritimes from April 5 to April 17 (but try to catch it before it completes its run in Halifax).

Dunn experience extraordinary

by **Edd Hansen**

To describe **The Dunn Thing** (performing at Sir James Dunn Theatre, 12/12/82), first you must set a context; through the wilds of Halifax on the worst night of the year, most of the small early audience came on foot for an "evening of theatrical fantasy", and a "search for **The Dunn Thing**".

The performers (Tim Cahoon, Angela Holt (director), Duncan Holt, Sherry Lee Hunter, Diane Moore, Sandy Moore, Ellen Pierce, and Pat Richards; A. Holt and E. Pierce co-conceivers) exhibited a tremendous range of expertise in the performing arts, playing off their differences and commonalities in disciplines to create an extraordinary terrestrial experience that took full advantage of the Dunn Theatre, a multi-levelled rabbit warren.

The audience never knew what to expect, as vignettes involving clown, mime, and dance media unfolded, and sometimes exploded (with a bang), on the stage; instrumentally, jazz, blues, and vocal play predominated.

The first act began subtly, almost sneakily, from literally within the audience. The rapport that grew out of this introduction developed through the next 12 scenes, as did the realization that we were being given entertainment that was as much fun to have put together as to unravel.

The second act began as quietly as the first; anonymous figures under a cloth conspired wickedly, finally giving birth to a large ball, only to have it snatched away by a naive passer-by, much to the dismay of its creators. The drawing for door-prize winners was a par-

ticularly exciting vignette, with hilarious audience participation in the celebrations of each lucky ticketholder.

The evening's *pièce de résistance* was **The Hunting of the Snark (an agony in eight fits)**, by Lewis Carroll, where the various roles in Carroll's adventure were silently acted out by the cast, accompanied by a reading of the 'agony' by Angela Holt and Ellen Pierce. This was truly the comedic peak of the show, with the cast showing a timing sense every performer wants, but which few get a chance to dare.

A very special evening it was (between-show wine and cheese party included!), and one well worth repeating. The storm reduced attendance greatly, and certainly those who saw the show, as well as many of those absent, would appreciate a 'return of the **Thing**'.



Anthony Monsarrat photo

John Neville and Susan Wright aren't sparring in this scene from **Special Occasions**, so we're just using it in the tradition of atypical Gazette photos.

A student farce

by **Arts staff**

"**72 Under the O** is a bedroom farce about university life," says Michael Howell, director of the student production opening this week in the Arts Centre. "Students can expect 1,001 laughs. It's full of bizarre people who can't deal with their relationships, so it's a relevant theme. And it's free."

72 Under the O, by Canadian playwright Allan Stratton (**Nurse Jane goes to Hawaii**) has been in production now for three weeks, and involves both acting and performance students in Dalhousie's Theatre Department. The cast includes Glenn C. White (last seen as Sir Anthony Absolute in **The Rivals**) as well as Sarah Hole, David Healy, and Andrea Bryson and Stephen Arnold (both recently

seen in **Madwoman of Chaillot**).

The play is the second Dal production for Howell, who is a third year acting student with directing ambitions.

Referring to the fact that a fourth year programme in directing has been dropped from the curriculum, Howell says "I've taken on this project to teach myself basic principles of directing. We have no budget but have had fantastic support from the department, although it's entirely a student effort." Howell expressed hope that students next year will make use of the ground-work done so far to aid in student directing.

72 Under the O runs from Thursday January 13 through to Sunday the 16th at 8pm in Studio One at the Arts Centre.



This could be a bunch of cavemen moving a dinosaur egg, but then again, it could be our idea of what one scene from "**The Dunn Thing**" looked like. Who's to know?