

Architect inaugurates new theatre

by Alan Filewod

John Neville's production of Ibsen's *The Master Builder*, currently playing at the Rice Theatre in the Citadel complex, is a lucid treatment of a play that is often misunderstood. Neville's obvious sympathy with Ibsen's complex morality has resulted in an exciting theatrical work. The achievement is noteworthy, for *The Master Builder*, long considered obscure Ibsen's detractors, is one of the most demanding plays in the modern drama.

Ibsen was to write only two more plays after *The Master Builder*, and this last phase marks liberation from the formal constraints of the nineteenth-century stage. *The Master Builder* is a symbolist play, but Ibsen's symbolism is not the abdication of realism that characterizes Strindberg's contemporary expressionistic experiments. Ibsen has used the realistic style itself as a symbolic or metaphysical device.

If it can be said that in his middle phase Ibsen attempted to make meaningful the "well-made" structure of realism demanded by his audiences, then it may be said that in *The Master Builder* he has used the techniques of realism as a source of symbolic action. The "well-made" play was a form constructed with deliberate and obvious artifice using a causal alignment of expository scenes and ingeniously planted complications. Ibsen used this technique, but he reached it with dialectical logic.

The action of *The Master Builder* is complex. It concerns a successful architect who feels himself controlled by "trolls," the forces within himself which enable him to strive for and achieve material success. Ibsen's credo is "I am what I am" - a echo of Peer Gynt's "To thine own self - be enough!" It is only in his encounter with a young woman, whom he had met casually ten years previously, that Solness realizes the awful restrictions of what he once saw as the freedom of materialism.

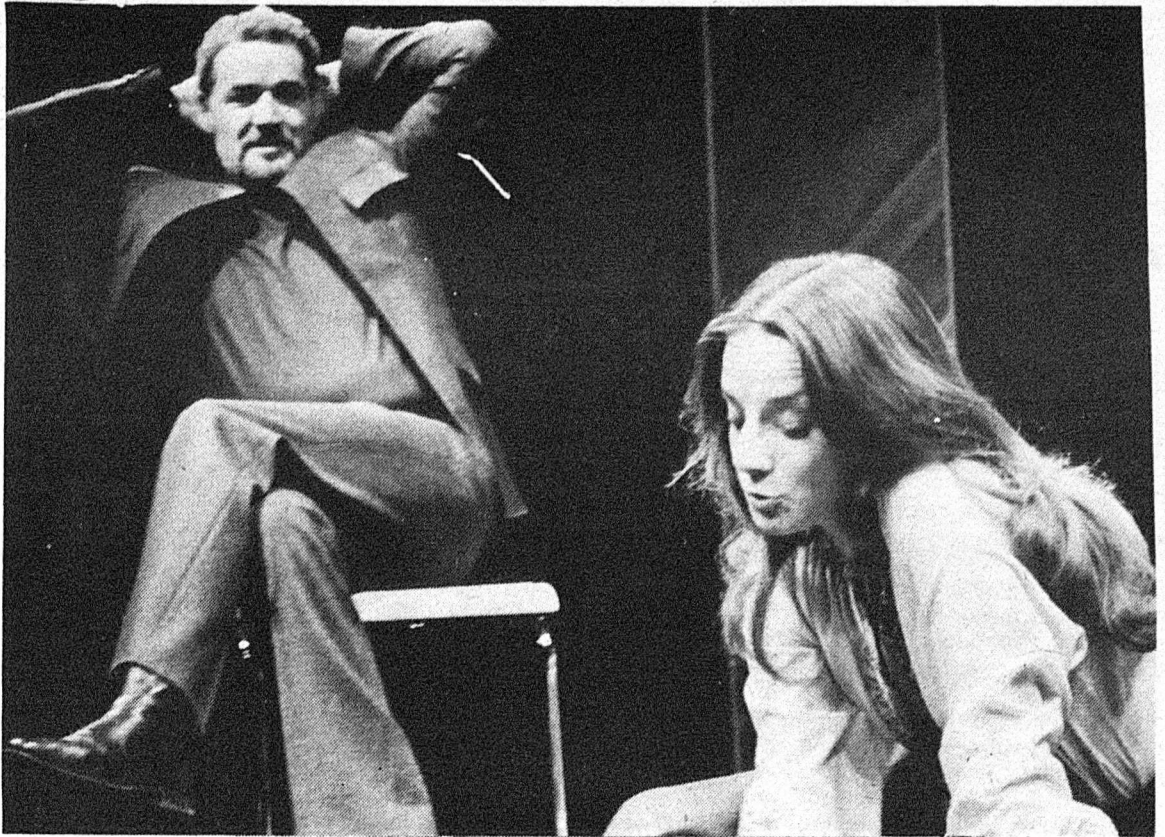
Ibsen was dealing with deeply-felt principles; the dramatic conflict in *The Master Builder* is an internal struggle between modes of consciousness. The theme itself does not demand symbolic treatment, but Ibsen has gone beyond statement and resolution of a conflict. The climax of the play is an inevitable moral synthesis of positions embodied in realistic characters. It took Ibsen his whole career to achieve this precise degree of control.

The complexity of *The Master Builder* results in a delicate, yet intense, play. Neville has taken meticulous care to identify the intangible pressures

which determine Solness' fate, but he is hindered by his choice of Maurice Good as Solness. Good is uncomfortable on stage; his movements are tense and awkward, and he has difficulty playing the subtleties of Solness' internal conflicts. Solness must be played on two levels at least. There is a tension between the assured pragmatist - which Good played with almost military bearing - and the troubled idealist. Good was capable in moments of definition, when Solness is in control of his world, but his performance was too broad to adequately express the transitions. The result was a tendency to obscure the finer threads of meaning. Good is obviously a fine actor, but he seems to require more intensive exploration to discover the precise actions which force the changes in his character.

As Hilde Wangle, the young woman who seems to alter the course of Solness' life, Susan Andre has proved herself an actor of substance. She is in large part responsible for many of the high points of this production, particularly in the climactic scene, where she virtually carries the intense development of crisis single-handedly. Her dialogue scenes with Solness suffered because of Good's lack of definition, but even then her discipline and precision maintained the crucial rhythm of the play. She was very much in control of her character, and it was a pleasure to watch.

Neville's direction was at first erratic; the pressures, although pointed out, were slow to



Joyce Campion and Maurice Good on the set of *The Innocents*.

develop. But the third act of the play, usually the most difficult, is a model of clarity. The initial moment of the act, a silent vignette of Mrs. Solness sitting alone on the terrace, is stunning. As Aline Solness, Joyce Campion brings into sharp focus the entire thrust of Neville's concept. It is one of those difficult moments, in which Ibsen brings past and future together to suggest a larger realm of principle. It is a brief moment, but it sets the rhythm for the entire act.

I suspect that Neville was aided by the outdoor setting of

the third act. It provided a sense of space, which served to emphasize Ibsen's remarkable economy. For the designer, *The Master Builder* may be profitably considered in terms of line juxtaposed against space.

It is not until the third act that Phillip Silver's design used the suggestive values of light profitably.

Johan Fillinger's new translation is serviceable, and although awkward in places, brings out the humour and imagery of Ibsen's dialogue. It is easy to listen to, and a good tool

for the actors. It should, I hope, help dispense with the myth that Ibsen's dialogue is pedantic and stiff.

The Master Builder has set a promising standard for the Rice Theatre. In contrast to the architecture of the mainstage Schoctor Theatre, which was in large part responsible for a weary *Romeo and Juliet*, the Rice has the potential of an exciting theatre space. If the season's opening productions are any indication, the Rice will prove more valuable by far than the larger, more expensive Schoctor.

Shotgun blasts drunk audiences into frenzy

If you have been around campus for any length of time, you have probably seen Dave Wright around. Wright has been involved in more projects and events on campus than could be listed here, and most have



Folksinger Dave Wright

had to do with entertainment.

His new band, *Shotgun*, is not a mere project, however. Consisting of Dave Wright (guitar, banjo, lead vocals), Peter Dykes (bass, vocals), Bill Wesson (guitars, vocals), and Matt Lipinski (drums), *Shotgun* is not a mere shot in the dark.

Dave Wright, a leading force in the band, is a confirmed country musician, and has been all his life.

When discussing Wright and *Shotgun*, the topic of country music is unavoidable. Wright considers his major influences to be Hank Williams, Gram Parsons and the Flying Burrito Brothers, all of whom are "rural country musicians," according to Wright. Wright considers that true country music, unlike the Nashville or Los Angeles variations, "...is much the same as the blues. The songs are simple and honest, and concern themselves with basic human feelings: love, hurting,

and being down and out."

Shotgun excels at performing this type of country music. Audience reaction ranges from enthusiastic foot-stomping to uncontrollable drunken frenzies, as *Shotgun* plays those country tunes with zest, life and spirit.

"We don't play any song we don't really like," says Wright. We don't stick in any frills and effects - we play with feeling, not flash."

All veterans of the music scene, the members of *Shotgun* are hoping to avoid the rut of commercial mediocrity. Wright remembers the commercial excesses of being a pop star: "People start telling you how great you are and pretty soon you can't help but start believing it. The next thing you know, your music has become stagnant and empty."

Although *Shotgun* doesn't want to end up in this rut, they are considering recording an album of original material. A talented and intent producer, Wright wants the *Shotgun* album to be as spontaneous as their concerts. "We want to play for people who want to listen," Wright says, "and we want everyone to have a good time while we play."

While most everyone does have a good time, it seems the band themselves are having the most fun. This is what *Shotgun* is all about, good times, country music, and honest feeling.

"The type of country music that Gram Parsons developed is not as popular as it once was," Wright feels. "We want to show, in our own way, how good that music is."

And goldarn, they shor' do. *Shotgun* will be appearing along with *Wild Rose Washboard Band* as the Dinwoodie Social this Friday evening.

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Coming soon

Canadian author, W.O. Mitchell will be giving a public reading of his work in L-1 of the Humanities Centre, Sat. Dec. 11, 7:30 p.m. Mitchell is currently on tour, promoting his new, gift edition of his *Who Has Seen the Wind*, illustrated by the artist Graham Kurelak. Mitchell is renowned for his wit, and his frequent readings don't miss him.

The Wolfpen Principle (1973) Friday December 10, at 8 p.m. in the theatre of the xral Edmonton Public Library. Admission to this special event: \$2.00 regular, \$1.50 for students.