

# ARTS

## Black Bonspiel lifeless, Mitchell has vitality

The Black Bonspiel of Wullie MacCrimmon

by Richard Watts

The *Black Bonspiel of Wullie MacCrimmon* is a light-hearted drama working within the familiar theme of a bargain and competition with the devil.

It is an old theme that never seems to lose its appeal; the classically famous Faust motif. In the pop-art culture Charlie Daniels plays a song about a country fiddler whom the devil challenges to a fiddling contest, in the *Devil Went Down to Georgia*.

However, the treatment is not very appealing in the performance of the *Black Bonspiel* presently being played in the Shoctor Theatre.

As I have already mentioned, this is a light-hearted play. Reading the play one is aware of an urgent need for the actors to 'ham it'. With the exception of Claude Bede who plays Mr. O'Cloutie (the devil) none of the actors seemed to be able to bring that unique quality of 'hamming it up' that a good actor can bring to a light-hearted role.

I do not wish to give the impression that the play is empty or facile. Mitchell's play is gentle satire but certainly not vacuous.

But let's face it, the story is about the devil in a curling match. It is fantasy! And as fantasy it requires a little larger than life role playing on the part of the actors.

Hugh Webster as Wullie MacCrimmon is next to the devil the other best played role in the performance. However a greater degree of irascibility could have improved his characterization.

Reverend Pringle fails almost completely. Mitchell's book *Dramatic* says of Pringle "His manner is not suggestive of a man of the church."

Unfortunately that is precisely what Reverend Pringle's manner is suggestive of.

The design of the set is ingenious and allows the audience to follow the drama taking

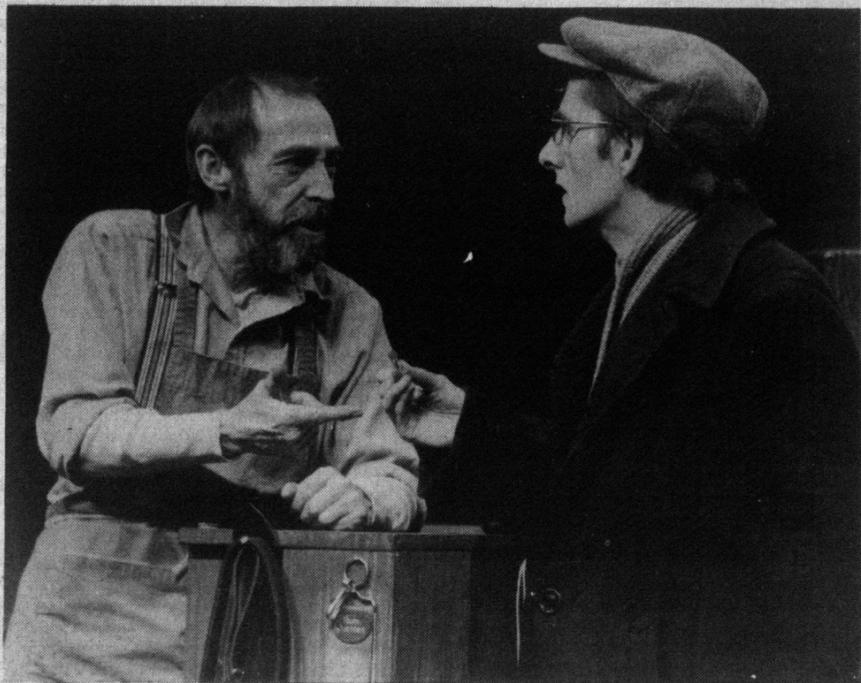


photo Ray Giguere

Hugh Webster (l) and Frank C. Turner (r) in *Black Bonspiel*

place within a house and still observe the environment in which the house resides.

The curling match played out on the stage is staged much better than I would have thought possible.

But that does not do enough to replace the lack of life in the whole performance.

The devil and his curling rink unfortunately steal the show in a play that is supposed to concern more earthly characters.

### An interview with W.O. Mitchell

by Richard Watts

Jack London once wrote in a letter to aspiring writer Sinclair Lewis "in order to be a good writer you should make sure that you put yourself into the novel."

Judging by that criterion then W. O. Mitchell is a great writer.

Mitchell is here in Edmonton to publicize his new book *Dramatic* and I was fortunate enough to be able to speak with him for an hour

or more in his hotel room.

The man is a mirror image of his work extending from *Who Has Seen the Wind* through *Jake and the Kid* and ending up with his later works.

His latest work is a collection of his plays never before published in book form.

"I first had the idea for this book when I took a course at University of Toronto in Victorian Drama; I realized then that the Victorians read plays as avidly as they went to see them and then I thought perhaps there was room for myself to attempt the same thing," says Mitchell.

Mitchell went on to describe how he spent approximately a year re-writing the play introductions and stage directions. He explained that in writing a play these things must be written as minimalist as possible; however, when the play is meant to be read one must devote a little more care to the direction of the reader.

One of the plays included in *Dramatic* is the *The Black Bonspiel of Wullie MacCrimmon*, which opened at the Citadel Theatre last night.

Set in a prairie town, the play considers a faustian bet made with the devil and a curling match played out with fantastical Satanist twists.

Mitchell elucidated one scene in the play in which the devil explains about Hell being a one resource economy...fire. The devil goes on to say to the human characters that when our oil runs out don't look to the devil for help.

"We have a saying in Hell," the devil says. "Let those upper bastards freeze in the dark!"

Mitchell explained at the first performing of this play in Calgary the president of a large oil company went to see it and laughed uproariously. It wasn't until he had gone home and gotten into bed that he suddenly realized for whom the jibe was meant.

This is a man for whom his country and its traditions live, and that is what gives his books so much vitality.

## Brahms trick, Rachmaninoff treat

Edmonton Symphony Orchestra  
Jubilee Auditorium  
October 29, 1982

review by Beth Jacob

A 20th century Canadian work, a Rachmaninoff symphony and a familiar Brahms warhorse made up the program for last Friday's Master series concert.

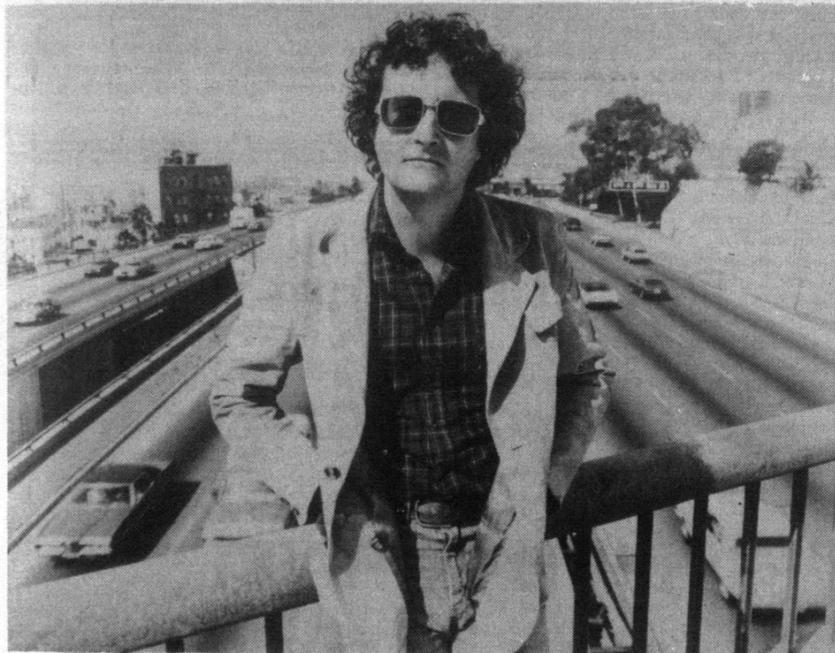
The evening opened with Roger Matton's *Mouvement Symphonique No. 1*, a modern work which first achieved a degree of fame in the early sixties. This was the Edmonton premiere of the piece and the symphony, under guest conductor James DePreist, acquitted itself quite well. The myriad of orchestral colours and textures involved in the work were sharply etched and the whole had a feeling of coherence and direction, particularly as the piece progressed.

My long held antipathy towards the music of Brahms naturally colours my opinion of his

"Concerto for Violin and Orchestra in D Major, Op 77", the second work on the program. However, I was impressed by the consummate artistry displayed by guest violinist Daniel Heifetz. He reeled off one technical feat after another with apparent ease, lending a strength and clarity to the demanding solo line. He even managed to imbue some poetry into the piece, particularly throughout the second movement, and the audience lapped it up.

For me, the treat of the evening (Brahms being the trick), came after intermission with Rachmaninoff's "Symphony No. 2 in E Minor". The work teems with glorious melodies and DePreist used his orchestra to bring out all the life in them. There was some nice ensemble brass playing in the second movement and a lovely clarinet solo in the third. The third movement was memorable for its expansiveness and lush feeling, setting a nice contrast with the rhythmic finale which ended the piece with an appropriate flourish.

A competent concert all around.



## Are you ready for Randy?

Randy Newman  
coming Nov. 6 to SUB Theatre.

plug by Jens Andersen

It is my considered opinion that Randy Newman is one of the great originals of pop music, perhaps even the great original (yes, David, even ahead of Captain Beefheart). Nevertheless, although I will be in eager attendance at his concert, I am not going to recommend him to the wide world without a cautionary warning.

Newman's music, to put it bluntly, is none too accessible. He is not a maker of tunes like "Johnny B. Goode," "Brown Sugar" or "Mystery Dance," which are instantly likeable and danceable. Rather he occupies - indeed, almost monopolizes - an obscure corner of pop deriving

primarily from old-style jazz and movie-soundtrack classical, with a trace of country, rock and God-knows-what-else thrown in to spice things up.

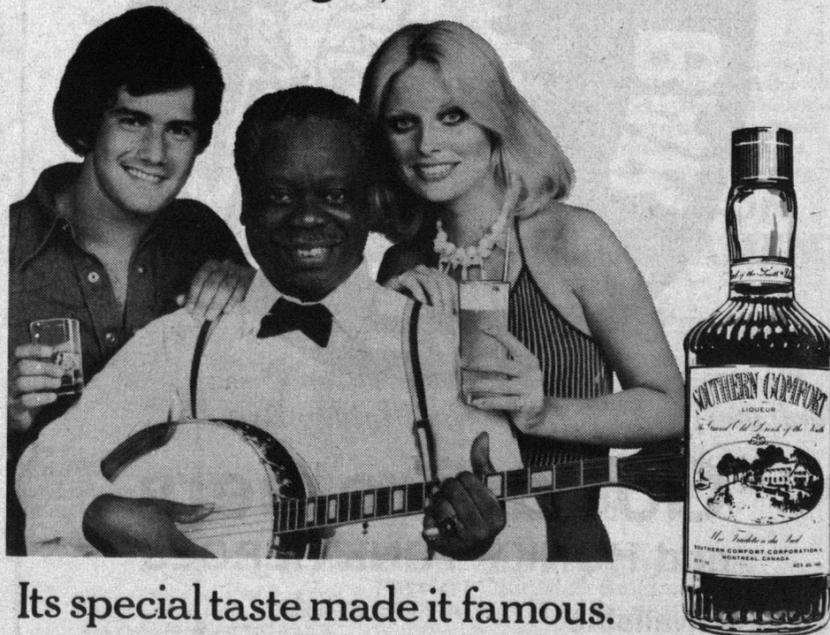
The music he produces in this genre is heady stuff, but, as with classical music, a few listenings are required for acclimatization. If you are thinking of attending, and know nothing about Newman except "Short People" and "Mama Told Me not to Come," I would suggest sampling one of his records first, say *12 Songs* or *Good Ole Boys*, which I would judge his two best; or *Randy Newman Live*, which will give you a better glimpse of his upcoming solo performance.

Better to do this than go unprepared to the concert and discover that Newman's music (not to mention his subject matter) is too weird for a bland, conventional person like yourself.

## Up and Coming

Thursday, November 4. The Folk Club and Keen Craft music present Mary O'Hara at the Provincial Museum Theatre, 8 p.m.  
Sunday, November 7. Musicians Associated for Social Concern presents "Me and the Mosquitos" and "Pastiche" by Sean Easley and Friends at the Centennial Library Theatre, 7:30 p.m.

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