

## Neptune presents *The Sea Horse*: waterfront blues

by Chris Morash

A waterfront is a schizophrenic border, facing the endless optimism of the ocean and the squalor of a city's rotting dreams, accepting both. *The Sea Horse*, running Jan. 20-Feb. 12 at Neptune, is a play set in a waterfront bar run by Gert Blum (Janet Wright) who, with her lover, sailor Harry Bales (John Novak), tries to come to grips with what her past has done to her, working Harry's childlike hope against her toughened despair. The result is bitter-sweet magic that works well on stage.

A two character play like *The Sea Horse* will not allow many weak moments from the actors, and Wright and Novak are the show's strength. In Gert Blum, a role she is playing for the third time in her career, Janet Wright creates a character whose internal turmoils are far more intense than anything that manages to break through her coarsened surface. Wright breathes life into Blum, from her whiskey-torn, cigarette ravaged voice right down to her nightmare-distant memories of childhood. This is Wright's first appearance at Neptune—she likes to stay closer to her West Coast home—and hopefully it will not be her last, for she is a treat to watch, able to

touch moving depths of emotional intensity almost instantly. It takes courage for an actress to tackle a character whose mental barriers are stripped away like Gert Blum's are.

John Novak's Harry Bales, while just as interesting a character as Gert, is a more honest, and in some senses, a more subtle character. Early in the play, the character's simple, superficial manner gave me the impression that Novak did not have the same degree of control over his character as Wright over Blum. As things progressed, however, and more and more sides of Harry Bales began to peep out, it became apparent that Novak's abilities were every bit as strong as Wright's. In the end, we believe in Harry Bales, even though playwright Edward J. Moore has not created him with the same depth of vision he uses in creating Gert Blum.

*The Sea Horse* is a play that moves in little ripples, not big waves, and Neptune Theatre Director Tom Kerr directs it with a sure hand, bringing out the subtle shifts in emotion that give the play its movement. Basically, these shifts depend on the uneasy relationship that exists between laughter and sorrow. In

this production, Kerr makes constant use of this relationship, either building up dramatic tension to the point where it becomes almost unbearable, and then hitting us with a laugh line, or else piling laugh on top of laugh before sticking a pin in our hearts.

Ted Roberts' set, on the other hand, although its welter of detail was fun to look at during the intermission, did little for the production besides providing a background for the action, and was at times even a little distracting. His almost subliminal use of offstage sound, however, was both effective and welcome.

Overall, this is a very tightly-crafted show; not a great show, mind you, but a very good one. Its limited treatment of a single idea, and lack of a truly original vision, along with an ending that is, although thankfully uncontrived, weak when compared to the show's promise, keep it from getting further off the ground. Nonetheless, there are some very funny moments, some very touching moments; the energy level is high, and the pace rarely lags. *The Sea Horse* makes for a good evening's entertainment, and is definitely a play well worth seeing.



John Novak and Janet Wright in a scene from Edward J. Moore's *The Sea Horse*, which plays at Neptune Theatre from January 20 to February 12. Photo: George Georgakakos

## Alfred Hitchcock's savage return—'Rear Window'

Review by R. F. Macdonald

After the bewildering desert of Christmas film releases, we in Halifax have much reason to rejoice. The Hyland theatre has just begun a re-release of five heretofore unavailable Alfred Hitchcock films.

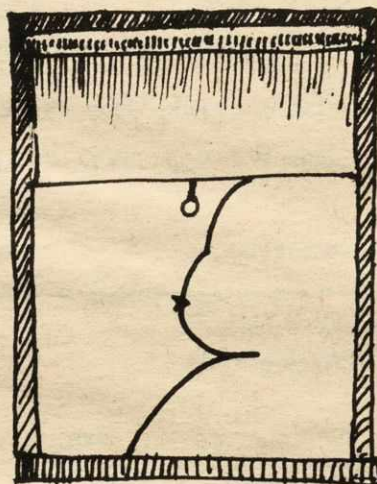
*Rear Window* is probably his most legendary film, long held up in litigation. It begins the series here, and will run one week or longer depending on audience response.

The other four are all certifiably important films, certainly of higher calibre than the current crop of horror/thriller imitations. Depalma, Carpenter, and Cronenberg will probably never make films as good as these.

*Rope*, *The Trouble with Harry* and *The Man Who Knew Too Much* are not quite up to the levels achieved by *Rear Window* and *Vertigo*, but they beat the rest of the slop that has cluttered up the regular cinemas this unfortunate Christmas.

I mean, *Terms of Endearment*? *Two of a Kind*? and *Yentl*? What a ghastly season it was! Dirty Harry and *Scarface* gave us our quota of hamburger, so it was either blood and guts or songs and sap. Sheesh!

Okay, we'll get on to the actual film. Brilliant! Fabulous! A masterpiece! What? Still unconvinced? O.K., here come the heavy guns: *Rear Window* is Hitchcock's most taut, static, and chilling thriller. It rivals *North by Northwest* as his very best film, and thus it is one of the very best films ever made. Period. So (pant



), let's get into it with a little more detail, shall we?

*Rear Window* stars Jimmy Stewart as a laid-up Life Magazine photographer who stares out the back window of his small, temporary, convalescence apartment. There are only two sets: the interior of the aforementioned apartment and the exterior of apartments he faces.

Sounds abstract, you say? You betcha! However, Stewart's room is on the sixth floor; the neighbours he watches are all on lower floors, hence the camera has a fair amount of physical space in which to move around. This simple little construction arouses all sorts of unpleasant moral implications. The laid up photographer is actually looking down upon his subjects; they are his only entertainment, and he is, in essence, a peeping tom getting his kicks from the miseries of others.

There is no doubt that Hitchcock relished the idea of questioning the whole process of filmmaking and photography. Everything is shot from the photographer's view so that we are accessories to his shame, yet, like him, we can't stop looking. We partake in those little titillations; we want to see more.

The crime that is imagined or discovered, in the end, is less important than the act of intrusion by the protagonist. Therefore, as he involves his girlfriend (Grace Kelly) and his nurse, they become offerings in a very dangerous game of moral retribution.

A similar situation erupted in *Psycho*. Janet Leigh was very normal until she decided to break the rules. When she stole the money and fled, she entered a world outside of human justice. The fate she met was not incidental; she wouldn't have gone to

the Bates Motel had she not been on the run.

This is Hitchcock's most disturbing theme as it suggests that people choose to risk non-human justice, flirting with doom for the flightiest reasons. In *Psycho* it was monetary gain, in *Rear Window* it is even worse, as boredom and confinement could be a description of the current mental state of humanity as a whole. Certainly you can see why the New York critics hailed this as the film event of the year.

As to the actual filmmaking, it is a consummate piece of work. Hitchcock was never a slavish visual poet, constructing pretty pictures and letting the camera slowly do homage to them. He was always the technologist, relying on editing, direction of actors, and camera angle manipulations.

If he did not have a good

script he usually did not turn out a memorable movie. Of course, he was a formidable talent scout so he managed to bring together all the right elements: visuals, acting, sets, music, pacing and scripts.

The five films in the series date from his middle period—the late 40's and all of the 50's. This was the period of his greatest achievements.

So, see *Rear Window* if you can; and if you can't, catch *Vertigo*, again with Jimmy Stewart. And by all means, attempt to see *Rope*, *The Trouble with Harry*, and *The Man Who Knew Too Much*. And wish David Cronenberg, Brian DePalma, John Carpenter and the host of others luck.

Perhaps a new generation of filmmakers will be inspired by *Rear Window*—who knows, it may be you!

## What are you doing for lunch?

by Maven Gates

Looking for a different kind of entertainment during your lunch than the usual bump and bustle of the SUB cafeteria? Would you like to have something other than your elbows and ribs stimulated?

If you answered 'yes' to either of these questions, the Neptune Theatre just might have something to fit the bill. Lunchtime Theatre has returned. For just \$3.00 you can see a 1-hour play and, if you haven't brought your lunch in a bag, food can be

bought in the lobby.

Joan Orenstein and Denny Doherty will be appearing in *Next* which plays daily at 12:05 p.m. on Jan. 26, 27 & 29, and Feb. 1, 2 & 3. *Next*, a rapid-fire comedy with a twist, is a living example of what everyone knows... you can never fool the army.

Doherty (formerly of the Mamas and Papas) will be seen as a timid, middle-aged man who has been called up for a draft induction examination.

Orenstein (fresh from her appearance as Edna Weed in *You Better Watch Out*, *You Better Not Die*) plays an icy, insensitive medic with the manner of a marine top-sergeant. Her job is to take him through the paces of a physical, stripping him down to his quivering soul, as well as to his actual bare hide.

So, if you're looking for something to break up that ol' cafeteria ennui, try taking in a play. It will do your mind and digestion good.