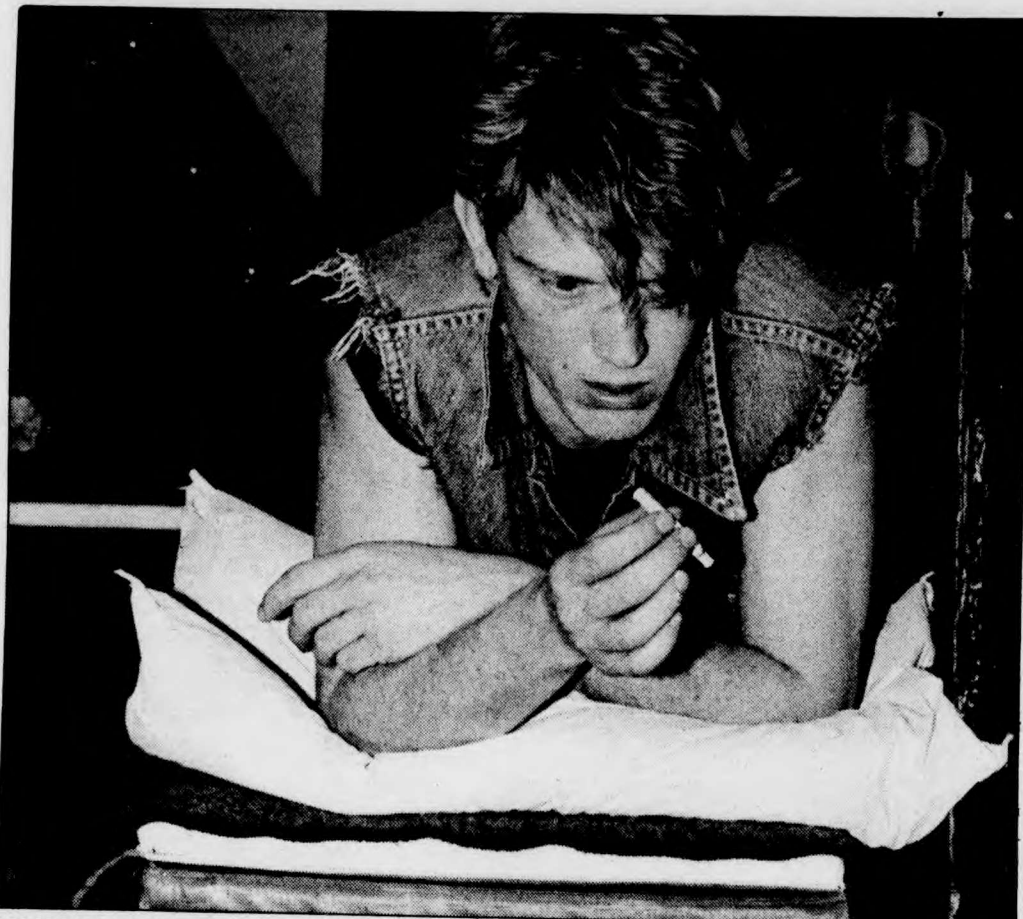


Eclectic Theatre seeks *Fortune* in prison drama



MAKING EMOTIONAL CONNECTIONS: Eclectic Theatre Productions' first presentation, *Fortune and Men's Eyes* concerns young men searching for direction in their lives.

By JASON SHERMAN

With an eye to producing drama by, for and about young people, graduating York theatre student Jordan Merkur has assembled together a group of actors, technicians and others into an independent small theatre company called Eclectic Theatre Productions (ETP). And, just to let everyone know how serious they are, ETP's first production will be John Herbert's *Fortune and Men's Eyes*.

ETP which consists in its permanent form of Merkur (Executive Director, Artistic Director), Tim Cormack (Publicist), Steve Ross (business manager), and Hayley Marnoch (stage manager) was formed for reasons artistic and practical. Earlier this year an attempt by Merkur to stage a show using fourth-year students

was quashed by the theatre department, which ruled over-indulgence on the part of the students involved. It then turned out that the Beckett Theater would have proved too small to stage the show Merkur had in mind. This combination of poor response and small space led Merkur to seek both a downtown location and corporate investors. Armed with a sheaf of references, Merkur came up with the money necessary to get things started.

"There's a big gap," says Merkur, "between leaving York and applying for professional positions." Merkur's idea is that people use ETP as "a stepping stone . . . to get hands-on experience." The project is made the more attractive given the spot ETP found for *Fortune*: Tarragon's intimate Extra Space. "We're more

accessible there," says the director. "People can see our work." Presumably some of these people will include the theatre professionals who for one reason or another consistently avoid productions at York's main campus.

But the expected audience is by no means merely of a theatrical nature. "We're targeting our audience for younger people," says Merkur, "although we're advertising all over to a fairly cross-sectional group."

"But obviously," he continues, "our choice of a play about four guys in a prison which deals with homosexuality, degradation and violence" is going to be limiting no matter. Merkur points out that the play has been banned for seven years in Toronto. It's a designation not altogether undesirable in this city.

And although *Fortune* is universally commended, ETP is not letting this production rest on previous laurels. Merkur is bringing in an "innovative directing technique which is actually (an amalgamation of) three different types of technique." The three are derived from the pioneering work of Uta Hagen ("what can you yourself bring to your character"); Michael Shurtleff (breaking each scene down into "beats"); and Jerzy Grotowski (use of "dance and music to help make emotional connections").

In addition, the actors are given written assignments covering various aspects of the production. A fairly good indication of the importance of such pre-production approaches

is indicated by the sheer amount of time given over to such activity: the company began rehearsals last December 8. Scripts were not brought in until the first of February.

Fortune concerns four characters between the ages of 18 and 25, in jail for minor offences. The play tries to determine, in Merkur's words, "what caused these people to commit their crimes. All the characters are searching for direction in their lives, and all have resorted to crime."

But the specificity of the content is in no way contradictory to ETP's goal of developing drama of universal import to young people: "Through emotional connection work," says Merkur, "the audience will realize that these struggles are no different from those of, say, a York University student. It's only that once in prison, everything is accentuated."

Merkur has a lot at stake with ETP and the response to *Fortune* will obviously be a kind of bellweather against which the company's future will be measured. Not, that is, the immediate future: the second show, a double bill of James McLure one-acters is in rehearsal and set to go for June, while David Freeman's *Creeps* is tentatively scheduled for August. Working out of their Yonge Street studio, ETP will lug over equipment and set out to the Tarragon the morning before the preview show, Tuesday 26. Shows are Wednesday 27 through to Sunday 31. Tickets \$4-\$6 with a Sunday PWYC. Tarragon: 531-1827. Support living artists.



WHO'S WHO? We don't know what the order is, but we know the names—Kirk Dunn, Maurice Wint, Mark Cowling, and Rolf Reynolds in ETP's *Fortune and Men's Eyes*.

Jarrett gets Bach to basics; Hogwood Handels *Apollo*

By ALEX PATTERSON

The second week of the Bach 300 festival brought Allentown, Pennsylvania's most famous pianist, Keith Jarrett, to Roy Thomson Hall for a solo recital last Saturday evening.

Though he made his reputation as an improvisatory jazz artist who never played the same concert twice, this time he was here for some straight classical playing. By Keith Jarrett standards, this was a mild transgression, since his concert career has been marred by verbal abuse of his audiences (for coughing) and last-minute cancellations (such as Ontario Place in 1979).

Still, none of this mattered on Saturday night, when he gave a thoroughly entertaining and sometimes exhilarating performance. Beginning with Handel's D Minor sonata (No. 15) Jarrett played with such intense deliberation that it seemed that each phrase cost him dearly in concentration and physical exertion. Each note of the *Allemande* was carefully weighed before being caressed with his light, yet assured touch. Bar after bar was imbued with elegance through his very personal vision. The *Courante* began introspectively, then became lyrical, as he operated the pedal with his right foot while tapping the rhythm with his left.

The No. 13 was less charming but more exciting: it was carried off with verve and élan at a brisk tempo. Jarrett milked pure musicality out of his concert grand from a score written for the harpsichord, glancing occasionally at the audience, as if to reassure himself that they were still there. This was a contrast to his improvisational recitals, where he writhes and gyrates, eyes shut, like a man possessed by his demonic muse, oblivious to all else. He shares with the late Glenn Gould the regrettable (but apparently incurable) habit of humming along with his music in a nasal and atonal counterpoint. Fortunately this was kept to a merciful minimum.

His approach to Bach, however, was less relentlessly staccato than Gould's, his enunciation of the notes less particular. The Prelude and Fugue in F (BWV 880) was soothing, the pianist's torso swaying, his head bowing almost touching the keys. The *Allegro* movement of the Italian Concerto was *vivace* at the least; it burst across the threshold of the stage at a stunningly rapid pace. The usually bright Jarrett sound was polished to an unprecedented lustre. The crystal wind-chimes that distinguish Keith Jarrett were blown about in a gale-force wind.

The Handel-Suite No. 8 in F Minor began with a prelude played in a halting Romantic style, somewhat at odds with the composer's classicism. Still, it worked, though less successfully than the fugue which conveyed the vivacious bounciness for which Baroque music is unparalleled. The way the concluding gigue was attacked was daunting in its virtuosity.

The final work was again by J.S. Bach, his Prelude and Fugue in B Flat Minor (BWV 891), in which the artist—with the help of his pageturner—explored some of the darker shades in the composer's chiaroscuro. Jarrett said recently in an interview that Bach is his favorite composer, and the shining reverence he brought to these pieces are adequate proof. He found much Art in this Fugue, and much absolute beauty in this "absolute music."

Keith Jarrett may have finished his improvisational career two years ago in Japan, but Saturday night's performance will make him welcome here as classical interpreter anytime.

The next night of the festival saw a rare Canadian performance of England's legendary Academy of Ancient Music, under the direction of Christopher Hogwood.

It is fitting that in this Year of Our Bach, 300 A.D., we should see at least one orchestra playing original instruments. The period instruments of the Academy are as old as the music itself, that is, between two and three centuries. This is more than nitpicking adherence to tradition; the older instruments lend a piece of authenticity and, more importantly, they change the sound. The sound is different not only because of obvious changes in types of instruments (harpsichord rather than piano) but also because of the tauter bowing of the stringed instruments. This results in a stronger "attack" of the notes and, often, a quicker pace since the sooner the player can get off one note, the sooner he can get on to the next.

Hogwood and the Academy are such purists that not only did they present Bach's Concerto For Four Harpsichords (BWV 1065) the way Bach would have heard it, but also the Vivaldi Concerto For Four Violins on which it is based. This began the program, with the Academy in their chamber orchestra mode: four violins, two violas, cello, double bass, with Hogwood leading on harpsichord and right arm. There was some nice trading off of solos between first and third violins, and the acoustics of Roy Thomson Hall favor this kind of music. (The auditorium is at its best when a score calls for each note to be articulated, such as here, rather than in something like a Mahler adagio.)

Hogwood's harpsichord, unfortunately, was almost entirely obscured by the double bass, and the whole group was not loud enough (no fault of their own). This, after all, is music written for the court, not a 1,500-seat hall. Compounding the problem is the fact that a harpsichord's sound, unlike a piano's, emanates from the bottom, so that those in the galleries were doubly disadvantaged.

The namesake of these festivities was represented again with the Orchestral Suite No. 3 in D Major (BWV 1068), its *Overture* overflowing with generosity of spirit. This was Bach's sprightliness at its most infectious and inspiring. The ensemble playing of the full 23-member orchestra was a marvel of cooperation and mutual aid.

The ubiquitous *Air* that is the second movement was leisurely and an utter joy, enough to convince the most hardened cynic that the world is indeed a good place to be after all. This captivating melody, appropriated by everyone from Procol Harum to the Muzak Corporation, seldom achieves such a dreamlike 'cloud nine' state as this. Euphoric pleasure such as this never lasts, and we were soon brought back to planet Earth by the *Gavottes, I & II*. They may breathe a less rarified air than the *Air*, but what they lack in transcendental power, they compensate for in solid musical common sense. The *Bourée* and *Gigue* finished in a thrillingly eighteenth-century climax, for which the large and attentive crowd showed hearty appreciation.

The second half was devoted entirely to Handel's *Apollo and Daphne*, a secular *cantata* written after the Pope banned operas from Italy due to their lewdness. Maestro Hogwood prefaced his performance with a brief explanation of this kind of musical theater, singing with a certain amount of gesture, such as might be found in ancient sculpture. This was how *Apollo and Daphne* was presented, with bass David Thomson and soprano Emma Kirkby declaiming their roles with the occasional motion or pose.

Thomas provided a suitable heroic Apollo, and Kirkby has as sweet and pure a voice as a Daphne could ask for. The string section proved that pizzicato needn't be gimmicky, and the oboist played variations on one of Handel's most beguiling themes, even though the harpsichord's appoggiated chords represent the composer at his most clichéd.