

Charles who?

by Trevor Campbell

The Best of Times, The Worst of Times
at the Bayview Playhouse

Last month I saw Robert Russell's one man show based on the life and writings of Charles Dickens and it seemed as if the popular author himself had arrived to lure me into his world of well-known characters.

Beginning with the author's birth, the play mixed Dickens' biography with excerpts from several of his stories. *Oliver Twist*, *Monsieur de Marquis*, *Mr. Dombey*, *Mr. Pickwick*, *Mr. Jingle*, and a *Haunted Railway Signalman* all came to life through the British actor's evocative performance. Russell's story-telling skills captivated me like a young child hearing *Oliver Twist* for the first time.

Dickens, whose readings caused audiences to hang on every word like children waiting for candy, would have been pleased with Russell's performance. The actor gave a playful adaptation of a middle-aged Dickens reflecting on his successes like a man content with life.

In fact, my companion and I discussed whether or not Russell's

exaggerated manner of sitting down on the centre stage steps was a result of acting or age.

These somewhat strained and affected gestures made sense however, because they suggested a man set in his ways and accustomed with assuming certain stances before stating his thoughts. Similar to the way that I might remove my glasses to make a point, Russell's Dickens would sit down and lean with an elbow on his knee when he was about to reveal an important detail.

Russell's performance peaked once he had warmed up with the first act. His timing and quick tongue in the soliloquy of the "Pickwick Papers" had me laughing to the point of being breathless. In fact I wished he had spoken more slowly as I missed half of the jokes.

The show ended with dimmed lights and Russell's bearded, expressive face emerging from the blackened stage like an apparition. As he told the story of a man slowly losing his mind in the "Haunted Railway Signalman," I realized how much I liked story-tellers.

His voice rode each word like a boat sailing an ocean before a storm and caused my jaw to hang open in increasing suspense. It was the kind of suspense which made *The Best of Times, The Worst of Times* a story that I did not want to end.



A Tale of Great Stories or An Evening With Charles Dickens: Robert Russell, as the inimitable author, gives an evocative performance that leaves us asking for more.

*Squall
spirals
at the
El Mo*

by Shecky

Twilight Rituals at the El Mocambo

There we were, much more aware of what was about to happen than the multitudes who had come to see the Bourbon Tabernacle Choir.

A piercing operatic squall spiraling upwards, drowned in gunshots of dissonance in a homicidal frenzy, abandoning him supine on the floor. An intense fusion jam resurrecting him to a night of roaring and acrobatics, almost short of screwing his mystic axeman.

It didn't happen. Perhaps *Twilight Rituals* didn't want to seem like ego-heads to a crowd that wasn't theirs. Maybe a few months off the stage has left them out of shape.

More likely, it just didn't happen for them in front of a tough, bourgeois "play what we wanna hear or we won't dance" kinda audience.

Regardless, *Twilight* was happening. From Jeremiad Rap to prophetic rock to screaming guitar offerings, the band was tight. A strong vocal performance highlighted of the show. Bassman Ishtar Mohammed grooved right along, but lead guitarist Thomas "Astrophil" Payne played well below his potential. (The drummer went unnoticed.)

There we were, exhausted from critical observation of untraditionally arranged rock fusion, ready for the mindless and drunken appreciation of a groovy three-chord 70s throwback.

Twilight Rituals are a York-based band. Watch for upcoming club dates in *Excalibur's* Arts Calendar.

TORONTO-BAYVIEW REGIONAL CANCER CENTRE
SCHOOL OF RADIOTHERAPEUTIC TECHNOLOGY

INVITES YOU TO AN OPEN HOUSE

SATURDAY, JANUARY 19, 1991

1:00 - 3:00 PM

FIND OUT about the new Toronto-Bayview Regional Cancer Centre, School of Radiotherapeutic Technology and a future career as a Radiotherapy Technologist. Become part of a dynamic team of health care professionals in cancer management. One of the most advanced areas of treatment where your professional development becomes a priority.

PROGRAM FEATURES:

- General (Bachelor of Science Credits) OR Students with a degree may be eligible for advanced standing with a reduction in program length.
- 36 month program
- Admission requirements 6 OAC Credits

FOR MORE INFORMATION: (416) 480-4561

2075 Bayview Avenue
North York, Ontario
M4N 3M5