

Two professionals from the theatre

Brian Meeson

You wouldn't notice Brian Meeson in a crowd, but this soft-spoken man is a very dominant and demanding director. He believes the most important aspect of producing a play is to create real characters who can be recognized as truthful people. Unless you watch Meeson direct, you wonder if his style would be so intellectualized as to be ineffective. Meeson's direction could be compared to the work of a potter on a wheel. He carefully shapes and colours each character until he achieves the effect he wants. Then he places the character on display with the other characters so that the correct centre of interest is achieved. All their relationships are carefully contrived. The style is mechanical and the result is not a stylish or stagey production, but rather a photographic portrait as created by the playwright.

Meeson originally worked as a director at Oxford and Cornell when he was a student. He has been in Toronto for twelve years and is presently a teacher at Forest Hill Collegiate. He has directed many productions in Toronto including "Women Beware Women", "Slow Dance on the Killing Ground", and University Alumnae's production of "Little Malcolm and his Struggle Against the Eunuchs".

Meeson does not seem to be concerned with a particular style of theatre or type of play. He is more concerned that Toronto groups will offer a wide variety of entertaining plays that will gain a large and satisfied audience. He agrees with the critics of Theatre Toronto in their claim that it has failed because of a very bad choice

THE VISIT

Frederick Durrenmatt's play "The Visit" is being produced by York University Players (York's extra-curricular drama club), this weekend February 28th to March 2nd in Burton Auditorium. "The Visit" is the story of the wealthiest woman in the world who returns to her former home town to buy justice.

Excalibur writer Don McKay spent an evening rehearsal with the director Brian Meeson and the leading lady Davena Turvey. Before the rehearsal Miss Turvey and Mr. Meeson discussed their ideas on theatre, particularly in Toronto.

of plays. Meeson claims that Toronto needs healthy competition between groups to achieve this ideal. He points out that the year the Crest Theatre Company and the Canadian Players each produced a full season of plays was one of the best in Toronto theatre history. The reason, according to Meeson, is that the two groups had to compete for the audience.

Meeson is not against experimentation in the theatre. He has much respect for Toronto Workshop Productions although he said the success of their method depends on the play being extremely poor. As for the nudity in the theatre he made only two comments:

On "Hair" — The production is so involved with technical gimmicks that the nudity becomes secondary. Also the second act is much better theatre.

On the London version of "Fortune and Men's Eyes" — the producer seemed to be jumping on the "Hair" bandwagon but the sophisticated London audiences don't go

to the theatre just to see another fellow's scrotum.

Brian Meeson will never rock the Canadian theatre scene, but he is the type of solid director who is helping to form a base for respectable English-language entertainment in Canada.



Brian Meeson: His direction can be compared to that of a potter on a wheel.



pix by Cooper who snapped them at dress rehearsal

Professional actress Davena Turvey plays the wealthiest woman in the world in Y.U.P.'s production of The Visit.

Davena Turvey

Clara Zachanassian is the wealthiest woman in the world. She believes she can buy whatever she wants — including justice.

Davena Turvey, a professional actress, must create this unusual character in "The Visit". Watching her rehearse is a pleasure. Off stage she is totally relaxed and yet on stage she becomes the arrogant, impetuous and absurd Clara Z. Her approach to the character is systematic with the aim of presenting a believable woman with a multitude of dimensions to her personality, not just the eccentric stereotype that could easily evolve from Durrenmatt's script.

Miss Turvey has acted with Ben and Sylvia Lennick in "Uncle Vanya"; under Brian Meeson in "A Month in the Country"; with Dennis Sweeting in "Charlie's

Aunt" and most recently in Trio Production's "Black Comedy". Although originally not from Toronto she has enthusiasm for the Toronto theatre scene and feels it has great potential.

Arena Stages

Miss Turvey has definite opinions about theatre architecture and tends to share Nathan Cohen's dislike of arena stages such as Burton Auditorium where she feels the audience will press in too close to the actors. However, in spite of this, she says "the Visit" fits the stage fairly well and that she will be able to adapt to it. Her favourite theatres in Toronto are Hart House and surprisingly enough the Ryerson Theatre.

She says that the Toronto critics

are partly responsible for the lack of progress on Toronto's theatrical scene. She objects not to the harsh treatment given to professional companies, but rather to the cursory treatment given to the many amateur productions. If a second-string critic, (such as the Star's Don Rubin) was to attend the amateur and semi-professional productions around town that more young talents would be discovered and be given more encouragement. These younger actors and directors could form the foundations of an active Toronto theatre community.

Davena Turvey's style of acting is well suited to Brian Meeson's style of direction. They are working together well with the student cast for an excellent final Y.U.P. production for this year.