

Priest inspires poetic jam

Like ain't Mr. Robert Priest one fuckin' great poet

Fausto Bedoya

When someone asked Nancy If she carried a gun in her purse, She said, "Yes, Ronnie gave it to me for when he goes away, but it's just a little gun..." Now ain't that cute? - Robert Priest Prelude to Little Gun/1982.

Well, Robert Priest was over at the Samuel Beckett Theatre on the York University campus last Thursday, September 30th. And he brought some friends too. I told him what I thought of his act as we left the theatre for a cold beer after the performance. I told him, "all you degenero beat-influenced bebop post-punk rock-poets are alike, you all wanna save the world and then get applause for it..." And he said that I was probably right.

Robert Priest is a poet who also heads up a hard-driving rock band consisting of Neil Chapman on lead guitar, Ben Cleveland Hayes on drums and Gwen Swick on bass guitar. He's been playing, singing and reciting in the Toronto area for some time now, and he's got an L.P. featuring the tune *Little Gun* coming out in a couple of weeks (Airwave records). Robert Priest is comfortably hysterical on stage. He reads, struts, yells, plays word-games with the band, sings lead in songs about violence, social injustice, drugs, insanity, politics and rainbows. Between Jagger-like moves he tries to sell you his hands, feet, blood, sweat and ideas. Some of 'em aint bad either. Like, instead of war with bombs let's fight war with food.

Let's drop gourmet dishes on the enemy, let's cover the Kremlin with a giant wad of spaghetti, let's unleash our secret weapon on the starving enemy, let's let 'em have it with the hamburgers! He plays raunchy trumpet with the band and sometimes accompanies his recitals with a rhythm guitar. His moods cover a wide range. Sometimes he hits you with an angry social statement, as in *This House is Divided*,

"I saw a man get up,
saw him writing on the wall,
"This house is divided
and it must surely fall."

Other times, he gets the blues as in the tune *Possession*,

"Yeah, well someone took
my baby,
'n they left me screamin'
Y'know I had that demon,
inside of me..."

But he always manages to mix misery with mirth. He slides your mind dangerously close to madness. In his *Rainbow* poem he is concerned about his rainbow's health, and takes it to the doctor. Tells the doctor how it's been sick, losing its colour, "won't arch over like it's supposed to." Doctor looked thoughtful and said, "you don't need a doctor, you need Rasputin, this rainbow's a hemophiliac." Absurd, ridiculous, sincere. Priest redefines poetic experience.

Making guest appearances before the audience of rock-poetry aficionados were Clifton Joseph who did a



Robert Priest and his band: (L-R) Priest, Gwen Swick and Ben Cleveland Hayes. *Excalibur's* postmodernist critic, Fausto Bedoya says Priest "redefines poetic experience."

jazz-poem eulogy in honour of Thelonious Monk, Devon Haughton who did an anti-war incantation with reggae background and Lilian Allen who gave an animated recitation of *Black Woman Blues*. A regular jam session! Roll over Jack Kerouac!

Tarragon's Science and Madness

Nothing playful about meaningless meanderings

Marg Wilson

"It's totally meaningless, just impressive!" cries Medeiros, a mysterious configuration of "science" who attempts to manipulate and control "humanity" in George F. Walker's new play *Science and Madness* opening the Tarragon season. And it certainly is impressive in its meaningfulness.

In a thinly disguised, highly improbable and completely predictable plotline, constructed from old Grade B Frankenstein movies, Walker stretches credibility to the limit with such profundities as "only the scientist can change the world", "science is the real poet", and "curiosity is much better than superstition", without examining, exploring or explaining most of

these comments within the context of which they were spoken. Granted, sprinkled here and there are bits of George F. Walker witticisms, but none of the calibre that could and should be expected following Walker's *Theatre of the Film Noir*.

The saving grace of this script is its impressive production. Under the direction of William Lane, *Science and Madness* becomes an actor's play depending upon the ability of the actors to bring out nuances and individuality of stock characters. Steven Bush as Medeiros oozes evil from the tips of his bony white fingers to the arch of a bushy eyebrow. The simplistic humanitarian, Dr. Beny Heywood, is portrayed by Michael Ball. If you're a fan of the television series, *Taxi's* Reverend Jim, Richard Donat's

performance as Freddy, the chicken sitter, is worth seeing.

Impressive is the innovative set design and lighting by Allan Stichbury. Placed in Scotland's Isle of Mull in 1900, the set drips with frightening cobwebs and is designed for mystery with crooks and crannies. Two massive revolving staircases are used creatively to provide scene changes.

Certainly theatre can be fun; it can go for the cheap laughs, and entertaining dialogue can still carry a message but it can be done in such a way as to make an accessible point. Can it be meaningless? No. Not for an audience who made the effort to go to the theatre and could have seen the same thing on their television sets.



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