

# The case for drama at York

by David McCaughna

I could not possibly agree with some of those terribly avant-garde critics who feel that drama is a doomed art. They say that the stage is too restrictive, physically limited and is being replaced by the cinema. They go on, most of the great plays, like Shakespeare's, are better presented on film than on stage. True, the cinema does present greater possibilities in some ways but it does not replace the electricity and potency of live drama. The cinema can never capture the sense of intensity and life of the stage. There is a great future for drama and it's range of possibilities is ever-widening. Just look at how far drama has come in the past twenty years and it should be evident that the stage is and always will be one of the most essential art forms.

Drama should be stimulated in all areas of society, but, most importantly, it should be encouraged in the university. But this is not happening at York. Here movies seems to reign supreme as the most popular art or entertainment medium. There are films being shown practically every day and the place is swarming with would-be film-makers. Of course cinema is a much more fashionable art-form at the moment, especially in North America, but drama is and always will be very important and it should be given greater emphasis in our universities.

The university must be a centre for the development of drama. Not only should it provide ample opportunity for student direction, production and acting, it should also promote student playwrights and foster an interest in drama amongst the average students. If drama is to increase its popularity in the future and widen its audience scope from the current small, esoteric group of drama-lovers into the broader segments of the population then it must involve as many people as possible; it must become relevant to greater numbers of people. Today the mass of ordinary citizens consider drama an occupation for the upper-classes or the young intellectuals. The average worker or housewife never attends the theatre and the average student falls into this same category. Drama at most universities, including York, has a rather narrow following. Aside from the two or three major productions put on yearly by York University Players there is little other drama at York. I would like to see plays put on constantly throughout the year; plays directed, produced and acted by students.

I'm familiar with the Drama Society at University College Dublin (Ireland) and this group, entirely student-run, works marvels on a small university-grant. The Drama Society at UCD puts on two large-scale productions yearly like YUP's Burton productions. But throughout the year they present excellent plays in a small, makeshift theatre in the fourth floor of an old-building over-looking St. Stephens Green (Gerald Manley Hopkins once had an office in the same building!). Lacking a real stage, curtain, and backdrop and having only the barest essentials the Drama Society has productions nearly every week which are usually of very high calibre. Every time I was there the theatre, quite seated only about 45, was filled. I recall seeing excellent productions of *Billy Liar*, *Little Malcolm and His Struggle Against the Eunuchs*, and programmes of one-act plays by Synge, Albee, Chekhov, etc. For a virtually infinitesimal admission price the students of UCD have the chance to see very good plays put on by their fellow-students in an informal setting. This is what we need at York.

I'm not saying that we should dispense with YUP and it's Burton productions, but to put on plays in Burton costs a great deal and takes much preparation. What we need is some sort of a 'little' theatre. A simple theatre, seating around one-hundred or so, that would be perfect for students to put on plays of their choice. There are many students here who are interested in directing and a small theatre would provide them with a place to learn and experiment. York's 'little' theatre should be unconnected with any class or department; it should be open to all students in the university. I know that there are people in non-arts courses like science or engineering who are interested in theatre work. It would be very unfortunate if drama at this university is allowed to become boxed into some course of the Fine Art Department.

A small theatre would also be a place for the encouragement of student playwrights. We promote (in a pretty dismal way, though) student poets, artists, singers, etc., and we should also be giving students the stimulus to have their own plays produced. Run in a workshop sort of manner, a 'little' theatre at York would give playwrights a chance to work on their plays as they were being produced.

Drama at the university should be something alive and exhilarating. It should prove an outlet for the creative energies of as many students as possible. So far, York University has very little which distinguishes it from other universities. Perhaps if we were to develop a good student theatre we will become known as the university which fostered a unique and imaginative student-oriented drama programme. And, who knows, maybe there is a potential Beckett or Ionesco lurking around York, just waiting to be discovered.



# Ann of Green Gables, stay as you are ...

by RICK BLAIR

*Ann of Green Gables*, now playing at the Royal Alexandra Theatre, is pure enjoyment. It is not sophisticated, cynical, sadistic, or absurd like so many plays which have crawled into Hog Town this last year. Rather, what happens on stage for two and a half hours is something akin to the exhilaration a child feels when he first encounters nature, and what is more important, this excitement is passed on to the audience.

The plot is simple, based on the first of the "Ann of Avon-

lea" novels. The action takes place in PEI where Ann (Gracie Finley) is an orphan who is adopted by mistake by Merrila (Barbara Hamilton) and Matthew (Peter Mews). They wanted a boy.

Ann is a girl who doesn't know when to stop talking and this of course gets her into a lot of trouble. She goes to school and breaks a slate over the head of a boy named Gilbert who she eventually falls in love with. It's all very corny, homey stuff but it is played on so light a level that you could not possibly take it seriously. As a result the whole musical comes over successfully.

Of course there are many other reasons why *Ann of Green Gables* is enjoyable besides this particular emphasis of direction. All the major characters are superb, Barbara Hamilton especially. The choreography is much like *West Side Story*, with an emphasis on realism.

There is, for example, an effective dance which centres around the races at a Sunday School picnic. The runners do their thing while a screen at the back of the stage moves, suggesting that they are actually running.

The lyrics to some of the songs are a bit too corny to

take, but the most of them are very well constructed and sung with clarity. "Wondrin" and "Ann of Green Gables," in particular. Speaking of construction, the set is professional looking and creates a suitable atmosphere, despite the fact that it consists of drop flats.

In short the whole show is very slick and entertaining. Therefore if you want to see something which you might identify as truly Canadian culture (forgive me, Mr. Mandel) don't miss *Ann of Green Gables*. But I should mention that it only has one more week to run in Toronto, so ...

## Radio and Television

By David Schatzky

It isn't very funny any more. Television comedy, that is. When I think of SGT. BILKO with Phil Silvers, or the original I LOVE LUCY with Lucille Ball and Desi Arnaz, I could cry.

Yes, comedy is a serious subject, and the lack of it is tragic. It has often been said that what people laugh at is a measure of the personality of the nation, but I wonder if that's really so. If it were true, Canada's funnybone would need a transplant. After all, Wayne and Shuster are hardly great comics! (Why is it, by the way, that the genuine comic talent here has no outlet? Even scruffy acid-rock groups with no ability except to make raucous noises are cleaning up financially, while Dave Broadfoot does trade shows and only old ladies and kiddies know the CBC's Rod Coneybeare?).

Canada, as a matter of fact, does have many funny people who say funny things (sometimes intentionally), but they're usually doing other things. Larry Zolf is a political commentator, Barbara Hamilton attempts Tennessee Williams, and CFRB's Bill McVean talks weather and sells soap.

The last great comic to stay in Canada was Stephen Leacock, but he didn't perform much. Canada, as a matter of fact, has a tradition of turning out people who work on the fringe of comedy, and these people have always been lured down south by lucrative offers from the networks. In fact, most major Hollywood variety shows have Canadian producer-writers.

One amazing success story, not untypical, is that of Bernie Orenstein. Three years ago he was general manager of one of the Seaway Hotels, until he decided to chuck it in favour of writing. He went to New York where he wrote straight lines for Allen Funt on CANDID CAMERA (he lasted longer under that despotic aegis than any other writer) and humour for one of the talk shows. He then gambled and moved his entire family out to L.A. where in the past two years he has established himself as one of the most in-demand comic writers, along with his partner Sol Turteltaub. He's written for THAT GIRL!, THE HOLLYWOOD PALACE, THE MARINE-LAND PACIFIC SPECIAL, and many others. Now he is concentrating on THE BEAUTIFUL PHYLLIS DILLER SHOW, which shows how low a man must stoop to get rich in TV humour!

It seems then, that the fault isn't with the writers but with the networks in dictating the taste of the nation. Such garbage as THE UGLIEST GIRL IN TOWN, the decline of THE LUCY SHOW, and the absence of any comedians of the American burlesque or vaudeville tradition (such as Milton Berle) shows that people just aren't allowed to relax any more with top quality low comedy.

Sure THE ROWAN AND MARTIN LAUGH IN is hilarious, but it's too frenetic and 'in'. Sure THE SMOTHERS BROTHERS is inspired, but it's too pointed, too angry. Is life really that serious?

I watched the PAT PAULSEN FOR PRESIDENT SPECIAL and I laughed out loud. But what ever happened to whimsy, to nonsense, to slapstick, and to men who make you laugh just because they're funny-looking?

Laughter is as important as ... well whatever you think is important, it isn't as important as humour.

## Viet Rock

By Herman Surkis

Megan Terry's *Viet Rock* musical, opened the University Alumnae's 50th anniversary season in the Coach House theatre on Huron Street.

This show has been described by others as maudlin. I would like to add wretched.

Miss Terry's musical is an attempt at satire, and impresses one as a poor Greek drama, complete with chorus wailing and bemoaning the induction of their little babies into the army.

The actors lay on the stage in a circle, mumbling incoherent statements and words. "Blood, gore, Love, Life, Shit, ad nauseum. After which they leap up and play ring around the rosie for a few minutes and then literally fall into the first sketch.

The skits are a running commentary on "Motherly Love" and the brutality and uselessness of war. You follow the lives of several boys from induction (where they are treated as so many slabs of meat) through boot camp to Vietnam and the eventual death of some.

I must admit that there are several good parts in the play. There are several good impersonations in the take-off on the Congressional hearings and later Phyllis Benvenuto played the part

of an updated Tokyo Rose, called Hanoi Hannah. It is a shame that the material was not anywhere near equal to Miss Benvenuto's interpretation of it. Another good point was the dialogue, pun with the Moms and sweethearts of America protesting the war and the platoon sergeant defending it. "I have a duty to my country. Where would freedom be if we had not fought in Europe, the Pacific, Korea."

At times I began to feel emotionally involved in the proceedings, but it was usually quickly ruined with a piece of child-like sentimentality. One of the boys is wounded and lies dying in the hospital. His mother hopes that some mistake has been made, but he really is her son. As soon as he dies, in troops the chorus singing and moaning.

The material was terrible, but the players were competent. When you consider that the actors were all amateurs, except for Mr. Clements, they did an excellent job with the material at hand. My sympathies go out to a group of very able young actors who deserved much better chance to show their capabilities.

I cannot recommend this disaster, but if there is nothing on at York one weekend, it might be worth a trip to see this show, especially for those interested in drama as the idea of communication.

Besides the show is so bad that some people may find it hilariously funny.

## Finian's Rainbow

By Stevan Jovanovich

Although *Finian's Rainbow* was a good and entertaining musical comedy, it was not of the same bouncing or effervescent genre of *Mary Poppins* or *Sound of Music*. It had a good story with all the magical elements that comprise a good musical comedy. It is an adaptation of the fairy tale stage musical which ran almost 19 months on Broadway in 1947-48.

Fred Astaire who plays Finian McLonagan smuggles a pot of gold into the U.S. and buries it near Fort Knox in the hope that it will grow like America; a sort of irony by osmosis.

Tommy Steele, a leprechaun named Og follows McLonagan in the hope of recovering the pot because he and all his people are gradually becoming mortal.

Finian's daughter Sharon (Petula Clark) falls in love with the local hero of Missitucky, Woddy, who was played by a Canadian, Don Francks. The leprechaun, Og develops an affection for both Sharon and Susan (Barbara Hanceck) a deaf mute girl. Fear not, their affections are straightened out and within two hours Susan is talking. Like magic!

A very nasty sub-plot is woven into this theme of love and fantasy. The question of racial prejudice manifests itself in the form of an arrogant judge called Billboard Rawkins (the name even sounds nasty) played by Keenan Wynn. A quirk of magic turns the judge black and he gets the story from an inside point of view.

All of Petula Clark's singing and acting was sensibly and sensitively done. The songs, How are Things in Glocca Morra and 'Look to the Rainbow' are memorably done.

Tommy Steele, as the leprechaun gives the movie a lift, some dash and a real touch of magic. It is his interpretation of Og that makes all of the other tomfoolery credible. His rendition of 'When I'm Not Near The Girl I Love' is delightful.

## Harper's Bizarre

by Herbert Hilderley

About two years ago a group known as Harper's Bizarre released a single version of Simon and Garfunkel's 'Feelin' Groovy'. It was an immediate hit, and rightly so as it was a well-produced song exercising good two-part harmony. Since then little has been heard from Harper's Bizarre and after hearing their new album, *The Secret Life of Harper's Bizarre*, the reasons for this are apparent.

The album is allegedly, a look into the dream world of Harper's Bizarre, via their music. The album cover is filled with allusions to Walter Mitty and the beauty in our private dreams. The problem arises when the private dreams of the Harper's Bizarre are released for public sale as a recording. Their dreams are a bore! The brand of grocery-store rock they play to represent their dream world should sell big with doctors wanting music for their waiting rooms, but that seems the only foreseeable market.

The voices of the two singers are good but always seem too weak and shallow. They never become powerful and always linger behind the music and orchestration. On one song *The Drifter* they show they have the potential to win the female vocalist of the year award from Wayne Newton. Their voices are about one octave above audibility. However aside from these few annoying defects the vocals, instrumentals and orchestration of the album are tolerable and often well-done.

The biggest defect in the album is the choice of material. They do such oldies as *Sentimental Journey* and *I Love You Mama* which might do a hell of a lot for my mother's memory but very little for mine.

It seems the only thing bizarre about Harper's Bizarre is their inability to choose good music to record. This album will probably spend a lot of time unopened in its album cover which, by the way, has a revolutionary new design.

Founders Players present

# GREEN JULIA

by Paul Ableman

Burton Auditorium

Fri. & Sat. Nov. 1 & 2nd  
8:30 pm

"haunting . . . kind of weird" Bob Koledin, *Excalibur*

A comic drama, about two guys' illusions over Julia and their eventual withdrawal.