

ENTERTAINMENT

Speckled Band star, director visit

Sherlock Holmes' revival puzzles everyone

For the past several weeks a play has been running at the St. Lawrence centre which has achieved that much-sought after, but rarely achieved precious title in Canadian theatre: a "hit play". An adventure of Sherlock Holmes, written by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Speckled Band* was directed by Malcolm Black, head of the theatre department in York's Faculty of Fine Arts. The play features, among others, an astoundingly convincing performance by Patrick Horgan who has played the great detective in many forms, from radio plays to films and stage productions. He and Malcolm Black addressed a small student audience on Tuesday at York.

Malcolm Black

Director Malcolm Black did not choose the Speckled Band to coincide with the current explosion of Sherlock Holmes short stories, movies and plays. He had seen the play when he was 12 years old, he says, and loved it then; it seemed best to fulfill the St. Lawrence Centre's requirement for a family play. In fact, what most excites him about the current production, he says, is that many kids do come to see it and love it.

At the same time, there are definite reasons for the Sherlock Holmes revival, he speculates. "The television boom is over," he says. "People have much more spare time now. They are fed up with crap."

Although Black has directed more than 100 plays in his long career as director (taking in six years at the Vancouver Playhouse, and summers at the Manitoba Theatre Centre, Lennoxville Festival, among many others), this was his first experience directing a melodrama.

"What you usually do with a play is read it again and again until you have realized what the author is trying to say and how you will translate this in your production; in a mystery play, you also have to create a puzzle, and lay in the pieces and the clues."

Patrick Horgan

His nose is aquiline enough even without the fake nose he wears for the part of Sherlock Holmes in the production. His stature is tall and slim, his speech articulate, his accent crisp distinguished and very British. His wry sense of humour is underpinned by a great measure of English reserve. Urbane and a master of un-

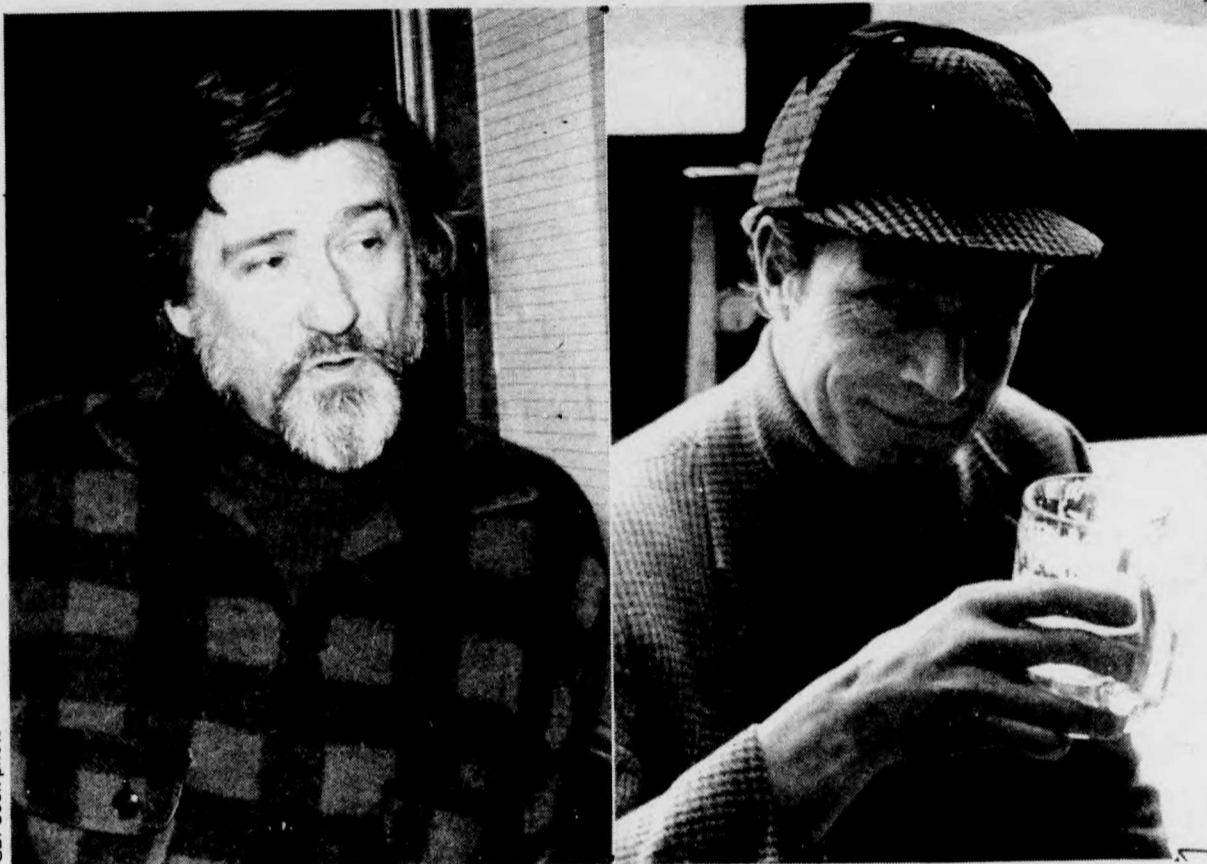
derstatement, he has a great body of information behind him and can tell anecdotes by the hour. In more ways than one, he is 'a natural' Sherlock Holmes.

"I could have been a judge," quoth Horgan, "but I never had the Latin for those rigorous judging exams. He commences with an impromptu performance of *Beyond the Fringe*. "So I became a miner instead; the mining exams aren't too rigorous; they only ask you one question: what is your name? I got 75% on that".

In a more serious vein, he explains that he became an actor by accident, at a time when he didn't know what else to do ("it seemed to be working") when someone asked him to be an assistant stage manager. But, he says, even way back then, he was preparing for the study of the role of Sherlock Holmes.

"I have succeeded in being born to Irish parents who settled in England," he says, "You'll see the parallel: Sir Arthur Conan Doyle was born of Irish parents who settled in Scotland."

Horgan's true avocation, however, when he is not on stage, is being a literary detective. Ever since he has discovered, some three-four years ago, the elaborate sub-plots that Joyce has buried in works such as *Finnegan's Wake* (Horgan is writing his second book on the subject), he has been fascinated by the literary archeology required for digging up subliminal second meanings which give the text its true significance. Having applied the same techniques to Doyle, he is now convinced that the adventures of Sherlock Holmes were written in what is known as bardic style and operate on many levels.



Malcolm Black as himself and Sherlock Holmes as Patrick Horgan

Dave Fuller photo

"Otherwise, it would be difficult to see why hundreds of societies have sprung up all over the world devoted to deciphering these relatively simple, straightforward, and in many cases dated detective stories, unless there is something underneath it all."

"There is something underneath it all", he contends.

He weaves an amusing intricate web of interconnections, word-games, mystic, mythical, historical and religious associations of the names, locations, identities in the Sherlock Holmes series. Is Holmes really a Christ figure? Are Holmes and Watson really one? Perhaps Holmes is Hermes, the ancient god? Much is suggested by the text and much can be substantiated, says Horgan. He is compiling the data for the puzzle, soon to be published in a book.

Patrick Horgan is becoming more inextricably bound into the lore he is ever more busily expanding. Sherlock Holmes is loving every minute of it.

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