

Tarragon does it again

Battering Ram's biting pace never lets up

By MIRA FRIEDLANDER

With the opening of *Battering Ram*, David Freeman's new play, The Tarragon Theatre has again proved it deserves all the acclaim it is getting.

With *Creeps*, the author's dynamic first play barely behind us, we are again faced with the realization of our own hypocrisy in dealing with handicapped people. Although *Creeps* deals more strongly with the immediate problems of education and facilities for the handicapped, *Battering Ram* is no less gripping in its destruction of the so-called liberated social worker.

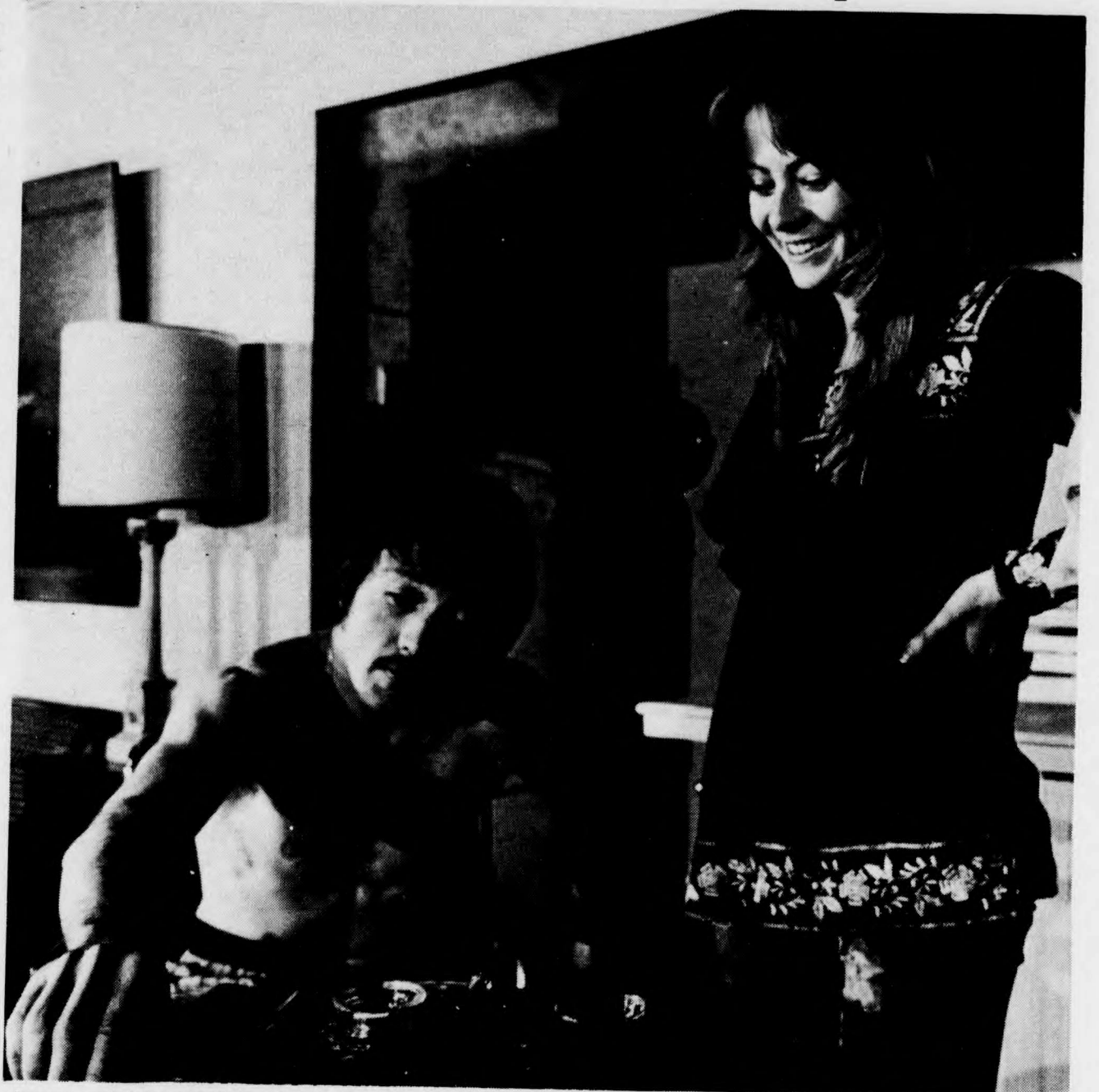
Patricia Hamilton as Irene deserves the highest praise for her characterization of the middle-class volunteer, who takes a young paraplegic into her home. She oozes in her cheap veneer of the absolute acceptance of cripples, while devoured underneath by a desperate sexual need that motivates all her noble actions.

In contrast to this over-compensating mother, who keeps trophies from all the 'in' causes she has helped, is the equally cruel daughter Nora. She is the 'together'

kid who knows that one shouldn't treat handicapped as if they were made of glass. In her attempt to be normal she swings to the other side, picking layers of skin slowly and painfully off their houseguest, Virgil, until he stands exposed in the entrails of his inadequacies. Freeman cleverly flings the three of them together to point out to us that in the end Virgil will always be the one to walk away while we cling to each other in our prejudices and insecurities.

It is to his credit that we are not faced with a long overdrawn melodramatic script as could easily have been the case; his juxtaposition of humour and pathos provides an even biting pace that never lets up and keeps us squirming in our seats. For Trudy Young and Frank Moore there is only praise, as well as the intense joy of seeing such even well-balanced acting.

Bill Glassco and his theatre is rapidly filling the need of Toronto audiences to feel pride in Canadian theatre. If the quality of the plays he picks remains so high, we have a light here that will continue to burn bright for a long time.



A rare quiet moment is shared by Frank Moore as Virgil and Trudy Young as Nora in David Freeman's new play *Battering Ram*, now at the Tarragon Theatre.



Good Eats

The rice is right

By HARRY STINSON

February is not noted as being a financially bountiful time of year, yet one must still feed oneself at some appropriate level. Therefore, let us examine the potentialities and versatility of that faithful filler and nutritious root: rice.

Firstly; it's cheap (that is unless you want to think in terms of such exotica as Canadian wild rice, which is larger and distinctly darker, smells somewhat like the East Annex at the Ex, and costs many hard-earned dollars per pound). If you buy it by the pound at Kensington, rice should run you no more than about 20 cents, and brown rice about the same. Get the latter as often as possible; despite the assurances of manufacturers, the shell on brown rice provides most of the nutrition lost in the converted variety. Besides, brown rice has a really good flavour on its own.

I find that the best way to cook rice is not on the stove in a pot but rather in the oven in a covered casserole pot (well greased) with the proportions 2 parts water to 1 part rice — it takes about one half hour or more depending on the volume, and longer for brown rice. An unusual and tasty twist is to use a liquid other than water: apple juice, for instance, or tomato juice or equivalent (in the case of the denser liquids, allow a little more than usual). Beef, chicken, or other stocks are frequently substituted to add flavour. If you're baking anything else with the rice (such as raisins, or coconut, or vegetables, remember to again allow for their absorption, and add more liquid).

Now, what to do with the rice? For a long time, when one thought of rice, one thought of Chinese food. This is of course, quite understandable when one considers that the Chinese and other Orientals have been growing and consuming rice as their staple diet for eons, and have devised easily the most imaginative and nourishing collection of ways of preparing it. The simple North American version involves first frying an egg or two in oil, chopping it up, tossing in some chopped onions, celery, green pepper, mushrooms, bean sprouts, bamboo shoots, (or any combination of these — it's actually a great way of using up scraps and leftovers) plus some shreds or chunks of cooked meat (beef, pork, lamb, etc.), then some pre-cooked rice; seasoning the whole shebang with some stock, corn starch, soya sauce (especially), plus garlic, onion salt, ginger, and pepper.

If you want to try branching out into some different phoney foreign fare, a roughly Spanish-Mexican concoction can be whipped up using tomatoes, mushrooms, onions, green and or red pepper, corn, celery, and (if you want to make it a main course) some meat (ground meat or the ubiquitous scraps again). Flavour it with cinnamon, onion salt, garlic, cayenne, chili, celery salt, and, yes, a little soya sauce goes well even here.

For something along the lines of a Middle Eastern pilaff, fry the rice with onions, mushrooms, nuts, raisins, coconut, seeds (perhaps), green pepper, and maybe a little tomato (again the addition of meat is up to you), and season with cumin, onion salt, black pepper, basil, garlic, touch of ginger, and some stock (if you want a moister result).

As I've probably already noted, a version that my warped palate has become addicted to consists of rice, grated cheese (preferably cheddar), soya sauce, in generous quantities, ketchup or other tomato sauce, beef stock, and any or all of mushrooms, ground beef (cooked), onions, or most other vegetables, all seasoned further with oregano, onion salt, basil, a touch of white pepper, thyme, and (in flightier moments) curry. You can substitute tuna, or some other flaked or fine-chunked seafood, in which case, alter the spices a trifle. Bake it all to a glorious, sticky goo.

To finish off a meal however, a good creamy rice pudding is hard to beat for popularity, economy, simplicity, and why, yes, even taste! You can get around the classic struggles over a double boiler, plop 6 tbsp. rice, 3 tbsp. sugar, 4 cups cold milk, and 1/4 tsp. salt into a well-greased baking dish, season with nutmeg and cinnamon, (raisins if you like — they're really good, but remember — more moisture!), and bake at 300 for 1 1/2 hours, stirring a couple of times during the first half hour to frustrate the growth of a film. Serve hot with syrup, brown sugar, cream, but not ketchup.

Cliff Keuter gave dull, low-keyed performance in Burton last week

By NANCY and ADRIAN HILL

The Cliff Keuter Dance Company, one of New York's lesser known modern dance companies, provided a low-key performance that was as dull as it was disappointing last week in Burton.

While the dancers were well-trained and very sensitive to movement qualities, listless, monotonous choreography drowned their abilities in a sea of introspective symbolic interaction.

Much as the inner meanings may have made the experience worthwhile for the dancers, they made little impression upon the audience. The tenor of the evening was more of a demonstration than of a performance.

Dream A Little Dream Of Me, Sweetheart was a choppy, mechanical melodrama, a "day in the life" of a pair of sadly pathetic homey characters. A blank-faced fellow went through his chores

making use of his spouse — he drilled a hole with her, answered the phone with her, worshipped her as a religious icon, and used her as a traffic signal. The dancers made their own rhythms that accented and punctuated the music. The movement centred around shapes and lines as the dancers assumed polished positions rather than fluid transitions. Highly synchronized solos created the odd sparkling phrase.

A radio announcer gave a slow dissertation on the methodology of meditation to provide the background for the second piece, which offered some clever variations on basic dance exercises. Much as the piece was occasionally interesting, it was rarely aesthetically pleasing.

An injury to Cliff Keuter put the spotlight for the solo of the evening on Elina Mooney. Donning a heavy monastic habit, Mooney engaged in repetitive, boring sequences that all too often ended in strange static positions that were predictable. The reliance on theatrical gesture went far in hiding the true ability that Mooney has as a dancer.

Wood had a conglomerate theme of death, tension-frustration, torment-convulsion, all held together an infant exploration of the whereabouts of wood. The piece was only half-way serious as jolly characters appeared purposefully inept. The dance was highly personal to the dancers; it was full of symbols from their lives together and apart. The juxtaposition of themes and emotions was again interesting, but not involving or moving.

Repetitious music the "hiccupping and stuttering" pattern of the choreography and the similarity of the pieces made the evening uninspiring, dull, and most unsatisfying. It was truly sad to see a company with so much potential use so little of it.

Violent but justified

By LAURIE REID

Dirty Little Billy, at the York I directed by Stan Dragoti, is concerned more with time and place than with character.

During filming, Dragoti said, "We're not making a cowboy film. The West is an environment rather than an art form, as far as we're concerned. We're seeking to capture the smell and feel of a different place in a different time." Based on this idea, the film presents a more realistic west than the typical "ten gallon hat and cowboy boots" western. The environment becomes the major character and dominant force of the film.

Coffeerville, in Kansas, is a collection of decaying buildings grouped on either side of a permanent mud puddle called Main Street when Billy Bonney, his mother and stepfather first see it after the long trek west from New York City. Instead of the rolling fields and wide open spaces of their dreams, they find a filthy little town and a ramshackle hovel on a barren acreage which is to be their home. It is in Coffeerville that Billy Bonney learns about guns and women. He becomes Billy the Kid — Dirty Little Billy.

The environment, lawless and tough, allows for an insensibility where blood and dirt become accepted, integral parts of everyday life. Audiences may find that the violence is too explicitly presented, but the important thing to remember is the character's reaction to it. They have become hardened. The violence, as gruesome and horrible as it is, is justified.

In casting the characters of Dirty Little Billy, the director stated that he was interested in solid actors, people who actually looked as if they had weathered the terribly trying times of the latter half of the nineteenth century in the rude, crude, dangerous place that was the old west. Michael J. Pollard as Billy, Lee Purcell as Berle, the town whore, and Richard Evans as Goldie, the homicidal maniac that takes Billy under his wing, are all solid actors. Pollard tends to recreate his role in Bonnie and Clyde, but this is mainly due to similarity in situation. He does, however, carry off the same fine performance. Purcell and Evans, especially, give fine characterizations of the saloon-living whore and gambler couple.