

# Prairie wit and humour

by Kevin Gillese

Dempsey, Hugh ed. *The Wit and Wisdom of Bob Edwards* (Hurtig Publishers 1976) 128 pp. \$3.95 paper/\$8.95 cloth.

Bob Edwards, editor of the Calgary *Eye Opener* from 1902 to 1922, is often remembered as the black sheep of a prominent Scottish family who came to Alberta at the turn of the century to create one of the most humorous, yet scathing, satirical newspapers Canada has ever seen.

He is also remembered as a drunkard of some repute, who enjoyed poking fun at politicians (although he himself once served as an Alberta MLA), and, in contrast to his vitriolic editorials, as a very mild-mannered individual.

Yet all of these points are relatively unimportant when one understands the social significance of Edwards' early work — something people too often tend to neglect when recounting the history of *Eye Opener* Bob. Edwards was a man deeply concerned with the political and social events around him. His newspaper, though printed in small quantities and with nowhere near the impact a modern paper would have, nevertheless concerned itself with affairs of national importance. Edwards constantly used the columns of his paper to present biased — what we now term "advocacy" — journalism to his audience: supporting the working man, railing against the duplicity of powerful politicians,

advocating the legalization of prostitution, criticizing the Prohibition after it had become obviously unworkable.

Edwards was a man seriously committed to the idea of social reform. Yet even today Albertans may often use humorous quotations of his—which he used to lure people into his social commentary or to turn a phrase with particular sharpness — without remembering his ideals and his determined efforts to improve society.

Calgary historian Hugh Dempsey is a man committed to the task of revealing Edwards' serious work to Albertans and in 1975 won the Alberta non-fiction book prize for his excellent work, *The Best of Bob Edwards*. This latest work, *The Wit and Wisdom....*, however, is not as good as the earlier compilation because it concerns itself more with neatly-turned aphorisms, "social notes" and jokes, than with his well thought-out and sharply-written satire. As such, it does not present a clear picture of the ideals Edwards committed

himself to, nor the manner in which he repeated his attacks on what he considered out-dated social institutions.

But the book does show the humor of Bob Edwards. Sometimes the wit does blend with a more serious note: "You can learn more about a man by taking ten drinks with him than you can by going to church with him for ten years." "It is as easy to talk as it is difficult to say something"; "We wonder what the sky will look like when the world celebrates the one hundredth anniversary of aviation."

More often it is simply funny: "If a diplomat says 'yes' he may mean 'maybe'; if he says 'maybe' he means 'no'; if he says 'no' he is no diplomat. If a lady says 'no' she may mean 'maybe'; if she says 'maybe' she means 'yes'; if she says 'yes' she is no lady."

But no matter whether Edwards is funny, philosophical or somewhere in-between, he is always enjoyable. This collection of his *bon mots*, is, if only for that reason alone, a valuable addition to Alberta history.

## Wiebe to read

There will be a public reading by Rudy Wiebe, author of the Governor General's Award winning novel, *The Temptations of Big Bear*, Friday, Feb. 4 at 12 noon in AV L-3, Humanities Bldg.

Wiebe is surely one of Edmonton's best-known writers, a major contemporary Canadian author. He has written four novels, including the highly-praised *The Blue Mountains of China*. He is also the author of a

collection of short stories, *Where Is The Voice Coming From?* A highly-regarded teacher of creative writing at the University of Alberta, Mr. Wiebe is also involved in the making of dramas, having worked in the past with the Theatre Passe Muraille, and involved with that theatre at present in producing a play about coal workers in Alberta. Rudy Wiebe has just completed a fifth novel, *Riel and Gabriel*.

## Good okay as Synge

by Shirley Glew

While actor Maurice Good has prefaced his programme with a disclaimer that he has "made rather than written *John Synge Comes Next*," Good is still the creator of a revealing portrait of the artist, which he performed at Citadel's Rice Theatre last weekend.

Good has wisely chosen material mainly from Synge's own prose and plays for his homage to this singular dramatist, but he also draws on the poetry of W.B. Yeats and his own interpolation of Synge's character for his monologue. Plagued by ill-health since childhood, Synge was an elusive and reticent introvert. In his work he presents the country people, fishermen and tramps or 'tinkers' of the county Wicklow and the Aran Islands as he encountered them on his rambling quests through the Irish countryside. It is his empathy for the dramatic simplicity of the lives of these earthy people and their stories which reveal his sensitive character. The invalid scholar's fascination with the simple daily lives, health, melancholy and occasional violence of his subjects never leads him to sentimentalize or idealize them.

Good's convincing portrayals of a variety of these characters are the delight of the performance which occasionally

lags during his expository passages. In turn, he skillfully and often amusingly reveals an 84-year-old yarn-teller, a teenage orphan girl, a desperate 'tinker' bartering for the price of a meal, and many others. These are the voices Synge spoke through.

Considering the material he

has to draw from, one is tempted to say Good can hardly lose, but to give credit where due I think John Synge would approve the concluding scene in the presentation, in which Synge's wistful musings upon his own imminent death were so effectively rendered.



Maurice Good as John Synge in a recent Citadel production

# HOT FLASHES

## CINEMA

Cinematheque 16. Fri. Feb. 4. Bette Davis *Dark Victory* (1939). 7:30 p.m. Sat. Feb. 5, Sun. Feb. 6 at 2 p.m. A cross-section of recent socio-political documentary films from Sweden with filmmakers Goddard Talboom and Ulf Berggren in attendance. Thurs. Feb. 10 Gary Cooper *Beau Geste* (1939) 7:30 p.m. Admission \$1.50 and \$2.00.

Sun. Feb. 6 *The Grapes of Wrath* (1940) with Henry Fonda. Shows at 4:00 p.m. and 7:00 p.m. at the Provincial Museum.

National Film Theatre, Tues. Feb. 8 *Igy Jottem* (My Way Home) (Hungary). Showing at the Centennial Library Theatre at 8:00 p.m.

## ART

Joint opening of a watercolour exhibition by Murray W. MacDonald and a photography exhibition by Sydney Phillips will be Sun. Feb. 6 at 2:30 p.m. at the Edmonton Public Art Gallery. Both exhibitions run till Feb. 28.

Two exhibitions, *The Alberta Art Foundation Print Show* and *Items from the University Collections* are showing at the Ringhouse Gallery on the U of A campus.

## THEATRE

The Studio Theatre presents two one-act plays by Tom Stoppard, *After Magritte* and *The Real Inspector Hound*. They run Feb. 10-19 at Corbett Hall starting at 8:30 p.m. There will be a Sat. Matinee on Feb. 12 starting at 2:30 p.m. No performance Sunday.

*Jill* a play by Lezley Havard opens Mon. Feb. 14 at the Rice Theatre. Tickets available at the Citadel box office ph. 425-1820.

## DANCE

Tournesol presents *Free Dance Images* Feb. 11-13, at the Espace Tournesol 11845-77 St. The collage of new dances are choreographed by Carole and Ernest Eder. Admission \$2.50, shows start at 8:30 p.m.

The U of A Orchestral Modern Dance Group presents *Dance Motif* 77 Feb. 8-10 at SUB Theatre. Admission: Students - \$2.00, adults, \$3.00, shows start at 8:00 p.m. Tickets available at the HUB Box Office or at the door.

## MUSIC

Thurs. Feb. 3 The Nitty Gritty Dirt Band appear at the Jubilee Auditorium. Tickets at Mike's. Show starts at 8:30 p.m.

The Department of Music presents a recital of new music prepared by the composers studying at this university. Included on the program are: works for voice and piano by Kristin Glade, Carlene Mercer, Robert Middleditch, Jamie Moore, Joy Simper and Rick Wiens; a work for solo flute by Robert Rosen; and a work for piano by Allan Bell. The recital will take place on Friday, February 4 at 4:00 in Fine Arts 1-23. Everyone is welcome.

Hovel notes: Thurs. Feb. 3 membership social featuring the Big Band. \$2.50 members, \$4.00 guests.

Feb. 4-6 Peg Leg Sam - Old time medicine show star, solo harmonica virtuoso and teller of tall tales. Eric Van derWyk - solo banjo between sets.

Tues. Feb. 8 - Jazz. Judy Singh with the John Gray Trio. Doors open for all performances at 9:00 p.m.

IN THE EDMONTON ART GALLERY

# cinematheque 16

## PRESENTS The FilmCentrum Program

new documentary films from Sweden  
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Godfried Talboom & Ulf Berggren  
in attendance

## THE EDMONTON ART GALLERY THEATRE

Wednesday, Feb. 2nd at 7:30 p.m.: Parts I & II  
Saturday, Feb. 5th at 2:00 p.m.: Part III  
Sunday, Feb. 6th at 2:00 p.m.: Part IV

Single admissions: \$1.50 members  
\$2.00 non-members  
Series tickets (all 3 programs): \$3.00

For more information phone 425-8476

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