

Arts & Entertainment

Diviners features Drama grads

by Jennifer Vollrath

I recently had the pleasure of talking to two of the actors in Studio Theatre's production of *The Diviners*, Terrilee Shannon and Troy O'Donnell. *The Diviners* is being put on by the graduating BFA Drama class, and directed by an alumnus of the program, Stephen Heatley. It is a contemporary piece written by Jim Leonard Jr. and chosen by the cast to be their final play featuring the graduating class.

The play takes place in the late 1930's in the small town of Zion, Indiana. It centers around the activities of a young boy, Buddy Layman, who has been brain damaged in a drowning accident as a child, and now has the ability to divine water. C.C. Showers, a former preacher, comes to town, befriends Buddy and then tries to help the boy. The townfolk react in different ways to Showers' arrival and his friendship with Buddy, though they only have the best of intentions.

The Diviners is an ensemble play with each character playing an essential role in its development. Norma Hensaw (Shannon) is the owner of a dry goods store and the religious figure in town. She believes that Showers has been sent from God to preach in Zion. C.C. Showers (O'Donnell) is newly arrived in Zion. He has renounced preaching and focuses on his friendship with Buddy. Luella and Basil Bennet are nearby farmers and Goldie Short runs the diner. Part of the reason the play was chosen was because in each character there is something to identify with. The other reason was because it is an ensemble piece with a great sense of community and support in it.

This is the last season for Studio Theatre at Corbett Hall; next season they will move to the SUB theatre. There are two more plays scheduled for this season: *Good*, directed by Brian Taylor, will showcase the designs of MFA graduate Steven Wade and runs May 4-13 and *Benefactors*, directed by Shirley Tooke, runs May 8-17. However, *The Diviners* is the final production showcasing the actors of the graduating class. If you want to see an excellent ensemble cast, in a play that relates to almost everyone, *The Diviners* runs nightly at Corbett Hall from Thursday, March 30 to Saturday, April 8 (except Sunday). Performances start at 8:00 p.m. and there is a matinee April 1 at 2:00 p.m. Tickets are \$5.00 and \$6.00.



Mike Spindloe

Kate Newby has just returned from a stint in Calgary to perform in the Phoenix Theatre's production of *Cold Comfort*.

Newby comes home for some Cold Comfort

interview by Mike Spindloe

For Kate Newby, a 1985 graduate of the U of A's BFA program in Drama, the work has been steady and interesting, but her latest role in a still-young career is a plum. "I've wanted to do this role for five years," she exclaims, "I read it while I was in the BFA program and when I heard the Phoenix was doing it I got in touch with [artistic director] Jim Guedo."

"It" is Canadian playwright Jim Gurrard's *Cold Comfort*, a twisted version of the travelling salesman meets farmer's daughter theme opening at the Phoenix at the Kaasa this Friday.

Actually, the farmer's daughter is a tow truck driver's daughter this time around and the setting is a gas station out in the middle of nowhere, Saskatchewan. The time is a spring blizzard and 15-year-old Dolores, Newby's character, is about to encounter the first person she's ever had real contact with apart from her father.

Newby says that "Dolores has had no connection with the outside world. Her father doesn't allow her out; she's never even gone to school. The play deals with what happens when you place a world traveller in Dolores' world. She has the

awakening sexuality of a 15-year-old but she also has the mentality of a 10-year-old."

Dolores is naturally fascinated with Stephen, the travelling salesman, who is played by William Davidson. Her father Floyd is played by Robert Koons. Newby continues: "Dolores doesn't have any normal experiences to draw on. She treats the stranger like a child would, but it's incredibly exciting for her — she's ready to explode with excitement sometimes."

The role is a challenge for Newby even though she coveted it. With only three characters in the play, she says, "that puts a lot of weight on the actors. We have a total of three weeks rehearsal and you always want more, especially with two or three-handers."

The character is also one which is alien to her: "I can't take a lot out of my life for this role because Dolores has had no life experience. The play is set in a naturalistic world, but the situation is unnatural."

Since graduating from the U of A, Newby has been "incredibly busy" with work in Winnipeg, Calgary and Edmonton. She has just returned from performing in two shows at Calgary's Alberta Theatre Project's Playwrights Festival, which, she explains, "concerns itself with giving Can-

adian works upscale productions that they probably wouldn't receive otherwise. They have corporate financing so that playwrights can have their plays properly produced rather than just workshopped." Of the quality of the plays presented, Newby says "it was good in general although a lot of the scripts still needed work."

Newby recently received a Sterling Award for Best Supporting Actress for her role in Theatre Network's *Mail Order Bride*, which was presented late last season.

She has praise for the U of A's Drama program although "it's not always valuable for everyone — it can hinder some people. School is something that takes a lot of time you really have to want to do it. It's physically and emotionally exhausting." Yet she points out that the U of A's program ranks along with the National Theatre School as one of the top two in Canada and adds that "the students that come out are respected in the field. Directors I talk to think they're very good and very disciplined."

For Newby, the training seems to be paying off. *Cold Comfort* runs at the Kaasa through April 16 and carries a nudity and coarse language warning.

Cadillac of Worms gig features buddha

Cadillac of Worms/Wickerman/
Rex Morgan B.C.
Phoenix Downtown
Saturday, March 25

review by Rodney Gitzel

I didn't think that I was going to enjoy this gig, seeing as all day Saturday I felt like I had the flu. Bleh. But when I finally went outside, and the beautiful (really!) weather cured me, I think; or maybe it was seeing Chi Pig and his SNFU toque that made me feel better (I wonder: do they sell SNFU pajamas?).

Anyway, off I went, nice and early, only to find that there was decidedly NOT a rush on the tickets (which was surprising). And then I got inside, only to realize that Forbidden Dimension were not there

turns out the singer, Alistair Hexxx, ex of Color Me Psycho (hurrah!) got strep throat and that Rex Morgan B.C. would be filling-in.

As one would expect, Rex Morgan, with their oddball pop, went over rather lukewarmly with the crowd, who had come expecting an evening of graveyard music ("One Surfed Over the Cuckoo's Nest" was about as close as the band came to that). The band put on a good show, though, sounding very tight. They went through a whole raft of strange songs, and probably the most well-received was "John Jacob Jingle-Heimer-Schmidt" (anyone who claims to not know the words to that one is LYING!). About all they lacked was a receptive audience.

Back from a hiatus of a few months,

Wickerman (aka Euthanasia beating to yet another drummer) fared better and worse. The crowd loved them, giving them a bigger cheer after their first song than RMBC had received all night. However, the applause was for the band, and not the performance, for the band played a pretty weak set. They were suffering from several things: stiff drumming, a bad mix, and a lack of energy, with the end result being a set that badly lacked cohesion. They played the right notes at the right time, but it just wasn't together. The guitar was sparse and almost non-existent in the mix, leaving the band sounding quite empty (everything falls apart when the soundman gets on stage). It finally took an old Euthanasia tune to pick things up, energy-wise, but it was the second-last song, so they mightn't have bothered. To the band's credit, they

DID do an Edmontonized Pink Floyd cover, namely "Another Shop in the Mall," but it floundered. Good idea, bad execution. Considering the support this band has, they surely have put on better shows than this one!

The evening concluded with Cadillac of Worms, and the Worms get bonus points! Any band whose singer keeps his synth in a coffin-shaped case and sets it up on an ironing board with a brass statuette of himself on it can't be ALL bad! And the Worms weren't (all bad). The set was a little uneven, but generally quite enjoyable. Good, fast songs about necrophilia, bad LSD trips, more necrophilia... nifty things like that. Too bad dancing at one in the morning gave me a headache, or maybe I'd remember more of what they did!