

Entertainment

"Theatre Parade"

Drama department stars at Harbourfront

By BOB POMERANTZ

Last week-end, the York Drama Department presented a smorgasboard of theatre at the Harbourfront Playhouse. All comers were invited to sample a little Peter Handke, a helping of Harold Pinter and a double portion of Samuel Beckett, topped off with an original creation by York's own Double Greenberg.

The evening opened with Beckett's *Act Without Words II*. The lights came up on two white-faced, sleeping individuals who were roused in turn by a mechanical arm from offstage. Pat Tuck portrayed an old, arthritic individual who moved slowly and painfully through the routine of getting up, getting dressed, eating a carrot and going back to sleep. She conveyed the hopeless, resigned feeling of the character with great sensitivity.

CLOCK WATCHER

In contrast, Elspeth Strang followed with a proficient por-

trayal of the fast moving, clock-watching character, who repeated the actions of the slow moving persona at break-neck speed. As the lights faded, the arthritic Tuck began to repeat her routine. Both actors were successful in articulating Beckett's message — life is futile and that however we play the game, man's existence is a routine-ridden empty experience.

Without Words was followed by Harold Pinter's *Monologue*. The set consisted of two chairs placed side by side, one empty and the other filled by David Bentley, who pursued a dialogue with the imaginary person seated next to him. Pinter's character is one who has experienced little pleasure in life. He painfully accounts some experiences of his 'companion', one in particular being his affair with a woman of which Bentley's character was greatly envious. Bentley was convincing in his

monologue, expressing the plight of his character with subtle precision. His rigid body movements, and wide-ranging voice modulations worked to delineate the innermost anxieties of his character, helping one to comprehend Pinter's concern with that hollow, bewildering experience called life.

YAKKITY YAK

The stage was then set with one more chair to prepare for another of Beckett's plays, entitled *Come and Go*. It tells the story of three women — childhood friends who re-unite after an absence of many years to reminisce about their youth. One by one, each of the women depart the scene only to have the other two exchange gossip about the absentee. The gossiping magpies were played by Soozie Schlanger, Pat Tuck and Elspeth Strang. Schlanger was believable as the woman in brown while Tuck and Strang offered proof that they're capable of moving in and out of varying roles

with no lack of grace or sensitivity.

Part One of the evening concluded with Peter Handke's work, *Calling For Help*. The cast was made up of the previous performers with the addition of Double Greenberg. They were lined up across the stage where the actors delivered their lines in rapid-fire machine-like succession. The dialogue consisted of a myriad of 'trivial' announcements, ranging from turn signals to news about the Royal family. Greenberg played the lonely, desperate individual in need of help but who, instead, met with a cacophony of indifference.

DOING OR DONE IN??

The second portion of the evening was less laudable. It featured *A Monologue For Every Man*, written by Greenberg. The work dealt with an actress who experiences a severe identity crisis, as a result of moving in and out of a multitude of roles. Risa Bramon was compelling as the troubled performer who never

knew whether she was a victim or the victimizer. Bramon's schizoid mood changes were accomplished by thoughtful variations in facial expression, muscle tone and speed of movement. The technical aspects of the production were cleverly conceived, the sound effects of imaginary audiences and the surrealistic lighting (which flashed on and off the actress's heap of discarded costumes at the play's finish) worked to help create a mood of confusion and terror.

PIQUED INTEREST

However, Greenberg's text seemed bogged down in an overabundance of verbiage, to the point where the viewer inevitably became totally confused. In spite of this, Greenberg was successful in piquing the interest of the audience in the psychology of the actor. All in all, Greenberg's acting, writing and directing skills served as the necessary ingredients for blending the talents of the ensemble.

Special entertainment interview with Peggy Sampson "There's some avant garde music that is not real"

The end of term marks the conclusion of the full-time teaching career of Professor Peggy Sampson, a founding faculty member of the music department here at York. Born and educated in Edinburgh, Scotland, Professor Sampson received a thorough music education in traditional history, theory, analysis, and composition from the world renowned teachers, Sir Donald F. Francis Tovey and Nadia Boulanger.

Within the music department, and the baroque music scene in general, Professor Sampson is noted for her wisdom, quick wit and energy; though of retirement age, she is an enthusiastic hiker and cross-country skier.

Excalibur interviewed Professor Sampson in order to get a last look at her thoughts and opinions on matters of interest to the York community.

By STUART SHEPHERD

EXCALIBUR: What formed your musical education and how did that affect your later activities?

SAMPSON: Well, I got very much indulged as a child because I had an inordinate wish to practice and probably an illusion that I might be a great cellist. Now that I look back on it, I think that it is very funny, how a child is absolutely ignorant of what it means to be a great cellist or a great performer of anything. They're quite oblivious of the actual boredom and solitariness and bitchiness that is liable to be involved in keeping yourself at the top.

My own playing of the cello was good, but it wasn't of the sort of world-beating category. I had no way to know that merit or any sort of musicality or that sort of thing, that's not what really gets you there. It's grit. And to quite a considerable extent, it's insensitiveness, in a way, determination, and physical toughness.

EXCALIBUR: You were headed for performance, then.

SAMPSON: I was headed for performance but I was very lucky in one respect, however, and that is that in Edinburgh at that time there was an extremely distinguished musicologist called Donald Francis Tovey who was a professor of music there and I suppose I always had him as a sort of ideal. He was a marvelous man, he was very, very sweet and terribly funny, and had an incredible, I mean incredible, brain.

In spite of my being so sort of set on the cello, my parents, thank goodness, thought it would be a good thing to have a Bachelor of Music degree. So I did that degree with Tovey.

I suppose that's a lifelong influence really because he was a very great man. I can hardly

think of any bit of the classical repertoire that he couldn't play from memory, even if it wasn't written for him at all. He would sit down and play string quartets at the piano, which is a notoriously impossible thing to do, and they sounded right; he knew them exactly. He was terribly able to understand music; he really knew it.

I've often wondered just what it is that people learn from another teacher of mine, Nadia Boulanger.

After I left her I began to wonder people learn from another teacher Nadia Boulanger. After I left her I began to wonder what on earth it was that I had learned from her myself because I felt that a lot of things that I had learned and done were frightfully strict. But she said the whole point about strict counterpoint is the stricter it is the better.

This aspect of extreme seriousness was very well illustrated in my case.

There is a French treatise on harmony by a man called Théodore Dubois which is the kind of Bible for French students. So I had this book to work from; she, as it were, handed it to me and said "Go and work at it; question everything he says, but work at it." So I went home and I questioned everything he said and the next lesson I had a lot of questions. She looked at me in a rather pitying way and said "O, mon petit, do the work first, the questions can wait. I tell you one thing: everything he says at the beginning of this book by the end he has discarded it."

So you see you earn your liberty very slowly, very gradually, and on the way out of the book you had learned how not to do all the things he had told you must do in the first instance. That is really, I think, extremely sound pedagogically, the only trouble about it is it takes a long time. Because I see many more formal programs, well they're all more formal — ours is the only one that isn't formal. The formal program can have a closing up effect on the student and can prepare them quite often, very carefully prepare them, for a situation that in the end doesn't exist. Whereas, it seems to me, that the York student is not ready at the end of the course, maybe not perfectly ready for anything. Not perfectly ready, but then one sees York students hanging around for an extra year, getting themselves ready for something else. At most of the other schools I think you'd find they were hightailing it away.

So I think that the way the traditional theoretical background is handled here is actually very good. I think it would be totally successful if we could limit our intake to the students who were really gifted because it suits them: they work hard and they progress fast. People who are not quite so quick in just growing up musically have, I think, a hard time and are a bit of a drag on the system; they may be the people who are unhappy, who do

some criticizing. People who are happy are glad just to get on with it, and they're not heard saying how great it is to be at York very much because they're far too busy being at York to say it's great.

I think it's great to have various things going on. I think there's a great deal to be learned from listening a lot, really, and understanding the Indian technique. It's obviously an art from so it seems rather unfair in a way to describe it just as a pedagogical tool, but I do think there is a great deal to be learned from it even if you really never do it again. It's got marvelous discipline; discipline's the thing one's after.

The alternative is to all spend our time doing only one thing. I think that's pretty narrow; That's what most schools do, they spend all their time doing classical studies of one kind or another. They learn to write harmony and counterpoint a bit better than we do, not much, but still they learn to play their instruments and play their Beethoven symphonies if they're orchestral players, etcetera, much better than we do. And then they have a certain exposure to contemporary music, most probably in the orchestra, and probably mostly a little unwilling because actually a certain amount of contemporary playing isn't terribly good for the development of a young technique. So their teachers may be a little less than enthusiastic about too much of that stuff, so they get channeled into a conservative kind of a point of view.

EXCALIBUR: How was it that you ended up here?

SAMPSON: Well, pure luck really. I was teaching at the University of Manitoba for something like twenty years.

But after I'd been there for twenty years, a lot of things had happened and I wasn't enjoying it nearly so much and I had a sabbatical year and I got a very part time offer right at the beginning when Sterling Beckwith was just starting it up here. I was asked to come and help with the Early Music Studio which meant teaching the viol, just for six months — very part time. I jumped at it because I'd never lived in Toronto; I thought it would be rather fun anyway. I hadn't got anything particular to do; in a sabbatical one doesn't really want to be free for all that length of time. So I came and at the end of the time... I was rather amazed by York, mind you! I was bamboozled by it! You know these terrible winds and these terrible snows and the terrible confusion and everything so often being totally wrong but by February I began to realize that in fact I'd really been enjoying myself very much indeed. The Dean, it was Dean Heller, said "Would I like to stay on?",

and I said "Well, yes." And so I had to resign from the University of Manitoba and I just came on a full time basis.

EXCALIBUR: Taking a different tack, what do you think of the state of modern music, after so many years involved in traditional?

SAMPSON: I like it. It's one of the things I like about York actually. Don't expect me to really understand what the really contemporary man is doing. It's a bit of a mystery to me and sometimes I've a suspicion that he's doing nothing at all. That comment is not a backhanded slap at any of the composers who are teaching here at York because I respect them enormously; though never am I going to understand what they do I think they are real, absolutely real.

I like to be where it's going on. I think the atmosphere is exciting where it's going on. It hasn't been, you know. "We can't touch that kind of thing, just wait till you're grown up dear." I think that it's very good that students, undergraduate students can get into everything at the proper age. I mean already an undergraduate is really a grown man, or woman, and they shouldn't be stalled for four years at that period learning things which are largely irrelevant.

But there's a certain kind of avant garde music that I think is not real. It makes me think of the sad death of certain kinds of insects, you know, which crawl around for a while and then they get on to the ceiling and then eventually they drop off the ceiling. I sort of think that some kinds of avant garde serious music has lost touch with reality and eventually it's just going to be found having fallen on the floor, and in the meantime will be swept up. I do have that feeling about some music, call it experimental, and I just think there's probably nothing there.

EXCALIBUR: What are you doing next year?

SAMPSON: O, I'm looking forward to it very much. I'm going to live with a friend with whom I get along extraordinarily well; we have bought a downtown house part of which is a hundred years old. There'll be quite a lot of sheer looking after the house especially after the garden. I'm going to teach one course — two half courses — at Wilfred Laurier; I hope to go on teaching the viol and playing the viol, I hope to have really much more time, and I want to have time to do editions of various things — there's very little viol music published. Generally, I don't think there'll be any problem, but I have no notion that I'm stepping into total oblivion.