

# Africa Nite '76

by Mike Greenfield

Tony Okeke, President of the African Students Association, again extends his thanks to audience for coming and hoped that Africa Night had served its purpose by displaying a culture and heritage which Africans were proud of. A heritage that is still alive and vibrant. Saturday night the energy that Mr. Makeke and many of the Associa-

tion injected into the creation of Africa Night transformed the McInnes Room into a rich and lively showcase.

Africa Night consisted of a lecture, a meal, costume show, a traditional African dance, and finally general gesticulating to the Hash House Band.

The lecture was given by Dr.

## Acting without light

by J.L. Round

**The Torchbearers** is a play in which every known fear of the director is realized - and all for the benefit of the production. Stage fright, loss of memory, inept performances, missed cues - you name it, they do it. But an excellent production by John Wood and a good solid performance by Neptune's assembled crew only serves to disclose the weaknesses of George Kelly's play.

lighter end of comedy. If, instead of acclaiming the group's ludicrous dramatic performance, the public had been cheering for what they supposed to be inane comedy, the play would hold together better and present the story and its characters more effectively.

The play's forte is good, genuine slapstick. All the characters come forward in this realm as the play reaches its height backstage in the



Joan Orenstein, David Renton and Rita Howell.

**The Torchbearers** concerns the perils of an amateur-theatre group production and the unaccountable public acclaim of one of its most inappropriate, shall we say, actors. In truth, the plot, which easily could have been much-improved, serves mainly as a skeletal structure on which Kelly has draped some rather sharp humour. Unfortunately, equally in truth, the play is as boring as it is funny.

Next to its rather insubstantial nature, the play's main problems is its standing. Peopled with an absurd assortment of characters, it is both too far from reality to be light comedy and not far enough away to be pure farce. It could have been either, but it leans towards the

### Lunch hour

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**A Dinner Engagement**, unlike its predecessor, which consisted only of soranos, featured the department's baritone teacher, Phillip May, and the tenor professor, Jeff Morris, thus giving to the production an air of professionalism and polish **Rider to the Sea** lacked.

The set, although not as effective as in **Rider to the Sea**, was well constructed and served its purpose better than adequately. It must be added also that **A Dinner Engagement** was not as dependent upon the setting for much of its effect as was **Rider to the Sea**.

Both mini operas did, however, reflect the time and effort put into their productions and in this respect crew and cast are much deserving of credit.

mock-performance of the second act. Most of the audience, however, missed the high part of the night's comedy. It was the between-act singing during the first intermission that gave me my take-home memories and not an actual part of the play. Perhaps as a curtain-raiser before the grand disaster of act two, some backstage prima donna was priming the imaginary audience with one of the most utterly devastating recitals of opera ever heard. Clawing desperately after notes with a voice hideously reminiscent to that of a screech owl, this woman's gem of a cacophony seemed to be appreciated for its most excellent humour by only two members of the audience - myself and the woman sitting next to me. That's too bad; it was priceless. I guess most people figure if it sounds frightful, it must be opera.

With its climax in the middle, the play duly proceeds to work against itself for the final act. Here, even previously amusing characters become tiresome as the plot dwindles away into nothingness, inopportunistly bereft of some of its most comical figures by the ending of the second act. Even Joan Orenstein's vociferous backstage maestra was failing to capture my interest.

It is nice to be presented with plays which are uncommon, or even unknown, but it is unfortunate to see a highly polished, professional theatre present a play which should have been improved upon or discarded. Critic's judgement aside, however, the majority of the audience seemed to enjoy and appreciate the production.



Benjamin Ijere demonstrates the 'talking drum' Emcee, John Okah, looks on.

Pachai, Senior Killam Professor in African Studies, to the topic 'Enchantment and Disenchantment in Africa' Unfortunately the lecture was not very substantive, employing a highly rhetorical style and suggesting philosophically that this was not the time to definitive conclusions, Dr. Pachai rather failed to say much

concerning the strained international relations in Africa. He spoke of the upsetting influence of European colonization and that it would be a long road to "normalizing" Africa. Right now the most pressing need was to complete the de-colonization of the continent (Rhodesia and South Africa).

Following the lecture was the meal. A potpourri of different African dishes. They all tasted good disappeared from my plate in short order (personal favorite were the fried bananas).

The costume show and traditional dance were wonderful. Greens, golds, reds, browns flashed across the stage. The models enjoyed wearing their native dresses and the audience enjoyed watching. Colors that bright and rich were a rare treat for the eye during a Halifax winter.

Perhaps the highlight of the evening was the traditional dance: two dancers each donning two huge, grotesque looking wooden masks. Both seemed to be highly impatient as they paced back and forth across the stage surrounded by dancers wearing no masks who appeared to try and calm the impatient ones. The dance symbolized villagers trying to cool down the heat of the gods. The startling and highly unusual atmosphere mesmerized the audience.

Africa Night must be termed a success. It will always be this way so long as enthusiasm and pride is its main ingredient.



Photos by John Bowman

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