

entertainment

HAMLET produced effectively

John Wood's production of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* at Neptune February 8th was a drastic departure from the classical play. Neil Munro played a decisive energetic almost flippant Hamlet which set the tone as a tragicomedy rather than a tragedy. Considerable editing of the long play was done so Ophelia's part was reduced. The scenery and props were ingenious and did not detract from the dialogue. The moveable catwalk was very effective for shifting the action and for presenting the ghost. The costumes were vintage 1930's and while making the play more contemporary or immediate they did not distract from the delivery of the Shakespearean language.

Michael Ball was a somewhat stiff and colorless Claudius, usurping king of Denmark. Denise Ferguson who played Gertrude, Hamlet's mother and Claudius's new wife, put the right amount of calculation and maternal feeling into her part. Joseph Rutten was an appropriately obsequious Polonius and Marti Maraden did a commendable job as the frail Ophelia who goes mad after being spurned by Hamlet. David Renton (ghost, player king, gravedigger) plays an excellent ghost, tortured by the need for revenge on Claudius. The electronic music, contemporary rather than 1930's style, heightens the ominous supernatural mood.

Hamlet's famous "to be or not to be" speech was delivered amidst rattling tea cups. His emphasis on certain words was effective and he achieved a fine balance between torment and ambiguity. The tea cups did not take away from the dignity of his existential dilemma.

One of the highlights of the play was the scene between Gertrude and Hamlet when Hamlet reveals his knowledge of the intrigue coloring his father's murder. It is a tragic dramatic scene unsullied by comic overtones. Hamlet and Gertrude rise to the stature of tragic figures caught up in the concatenation of events. A movement occurs behind the velvet curtain and Hamlet, with a 1930's gun, shoots

at the rat who is not Claudius but Polonius. Polonius falls, bringing the whole black curtain with him. The timing is perfect in this emotionally charged scene.

The final bloodbath scene is not tragic enough. It is too fast moving and the tragic elements have been dulled by the preceding scenes. The fencing duel between Laertes (Brian McKay) and Hamlet is played well. Because the play's

tragedy has not been emphasized enough, the audience cannot develop the imaginative sympathy needed to be moved by the accidental death of Gertrude or by the unjust deaths of Hamlet and Laertes. The characters fall in a heap on the floor and all of a sudden the long play is drawn to a close.

Regarded as merely a revenge play and not a tragedy, *Hamlet* was produced effectively. How-

ever, I regard Hamlet as a tragic hero who moves one to pity and fear by his downfall due to a flaw in his character, his indecision. I feel the Wood production did not bring out the tragedy sufficiently. Neil Munro is a fine actor and did justice to the character of Hamlet according to his interpretation. My bias runs toward the traditional interpretation.

by Kathy Tyler

Low Points Exceed High Points

by Ron Norman

Last Thursday evening, Feb. 13, The Dalhousie Theatre Department staged their third major production since the beginning of classes last September — **BREAK OF NOON**. The two previous productions — "*Hedda Gabler*" and "*The Insect Comedy*" were greeted with a mixed emotions; **BREAK OF NOON** follows much the same pattern. Written around the turn of the century by Paul Claudel, the play concerns the affair between a robust woman and a self-concentrated man. The play, though written early in the century was not produced until 1948 — quite understandably. The play was not a well chosen one for student production: one, because it provided only four roles for a department which has an enrollment of three hundred and twenty; and secondly, and most significantly, the play is rough on the audience because of its style. Commencing quite vaguely (like this review), and never really sorting itself out before the end of the second act, the play left the audience wondering exactly what was going on. In fact, the person with

whom I attended the play mistook the end of the first act for the end of the play itself.

The review is not meant to be overly harsh, the play had its high points and its all too frequent low points. The plot concerns the love affair between Mesa (Michael Hovey) and Yse (Janet Moir Howse). Mesa, as played by Michael Hovey was not that impressive. Michael had the voice and exhibited periodic flair in the role, but he definitely lacked a stage presence. His was the role of the frustrated, self-concentrated, unfulfilled lover (Symbolized by a solitary golden chair). Funnily enough it was a similar role to the one which he played in "*Hedda Gabler*" (is Michael being typecast?) I must admit Michael did do an adequate job on what seemed to me countless incredible hard-to-follow soliloquies (the final one did come off especially well).

Janet Moir Howse in what might be termed the leading role was not good. Janet's character, Yse, needed a mingling of the romantic and the ironic, but instead it appeared to be

completely staged. There was no sense of reality in her portrayal of Yse, so the exaggerated movements had nothing with which to play off of. She did not seem to fit comfortably into the role, and the director, Robert Merritt, must accept some of the blame. He either miscast Janet or permitted her to play that exaggerated role throughout the play; in any case it was a mistake.

John Darrt, in the role of Almalric, the former lover and confirmed atheist-chauvinist of Yse, commanded much of the audiences' attention whenever he was on stage. John possessed the stage presence which Michael Hovey lacked, but he did not come across as well as might have. He played the character a little too weakly, but did prove to be the best of the lot.

Charles Gosling, in the much subdued role of De Ciz, the husband of Yse did not have any effect upon the play at all. He lacked any stage presence and it must be questioned why he kept holding his head to one side all night.

Enough about acting and on to the highlights of the

production. The major highlight had to be the sets. Once again, as in *Hedda Gabler* and *The Insect Comedy* the technical crews outstaged the acting crews. The effect of the elaborate sets and ingenious lighting so overpowered the somewhat dismal acting that the produced contrast was startling. Those who produced the overpowering sets and lights are to be commended.

I must credit Robert Merritt on his devilish opening — I thought the whole effect was stunning. The scrim proved to be very effective, yet in a way it symbolized the audiences' inability to get close to the play (the vagueness of the material and the all too apparent staging of the roles were prime contributors).

In conclusion then one has to consider *Break of Noon* a failure, simply because it was not enjoyable. Before finishing this unholy mess I must say that

the Noon Hour Theatre, for one of those strange, wildly unpredictable reasons has shown to be better acted and much more fun than the major productions.

MUSIC, SONGS, IRISH HERITAGE, ETC.

Peter Gzowski of CBC radio's *This Country in the Morning* has called Ryan's Fancy "the finest Irish Singing Group in North America". This summer, Ryan's Fancy — Denis Ryan, Dermot O'Reilly and Fergus O'Byrne — will appear as regulars on CBC's *ALL AROUND THE CIRCLE* as well as their own show on CTV — *TOMMY MAKEM AND RYAN'S FANCY*.

The boys have only been playing as a group since 1971, but already have to their credit four LP's, 8 or 9 appearances on CBC-TV's *Singalong Jubilee*, an appearance on CBC-TV's *The Tommy Hunter Show*, and as well have appeared numerous times on CBC Radio's *This Country in the Morning* and *The Max Ferguson Show*.

The leader of the group, Denis Ryan, came to Canada from Tipperary, Ireland in 1969 and attended Memorial University of Newfoundland in 1971 majoring in folklore. Denis plays the fiddle, mandolin and pennywhistle as well as sings.

Dermot O'Reilly was born in Dublin, Ireland and came to Toronto in 1948, travelling with different groups until he joined Denis and Fergus to form Ryan's Fancy in 1971. Dermot has studied anthropology at Memorial University of Newfoundland. He writes poetry and songs as well as plays guitar, mandolin, 4 and 5 string banjo and whistle — and he sings, too.

Another native Dubliner, Fergus O'Byrne came to Canada in 1967 and played professionally with various

groups in Toronto for three years. He moved to Newfoundland in 1971 and attended Memorial University of Newfoundland for two years while playing with the group. Fergus, in addition to singing, plays the 5-string banjo, and 6 and 12-string guitar, mandolin, piano and Bodhran (Irish drum).

A happy blending of music and song, and Irish heritage, hard work, an abundance of talent and charm are mixed to perfection in the group known throughout Canada as Ryan's Fancy.

In addition to having their own Newfoundland regional network show on CBC this summer, viewers will be able to enjoy them all across Canada every week on *ALL AROUND THE CIRCLE* — from Newfoundland.