

Playwrights workshops

By MATT WILSON

Jim MacSwain, the Co-ordinator of the Dramatists' Co-op of Nova Scotia, is looking for people who want to write plays.

"We are the only group in Nova Scotia that is solely committed to helping playwrights develop their talents says MacSwain, "and I personally extend my invitation to all those aspiring playwrights who love their art and want to help it grow."

The Dramatists' Co-op of Nova Scotia is working to encourage the

development of playwrights and dramatists.

The Co-op was founded in the 70's by members of the Writers' Federation of Nova Scotia who wanted to specialize on the development of dramatic writing. Both the Writers' Federation and the Dramatists' Co-op are funded by the Province through its Department of Culture, Recreation and Fitness. They share offices at 5516 Spring Garden Road in Halifax.

Encouragement of playwrights takes several forms. First, the co-op holds competitions from time to time, with prizes. Recently, playw-

rights were encouraged to submit works to the co-op in order to compete for a chance to do a paid public reading of a 15 minute segment of a play. Such readings give playwrights a bit of money, and a chance to expose their work to potential markets.

The co-op also publishes and maintains a catalogue of plays by residents of Nova Scotia which can be drawn on by amateur and professional theatre companies anxious to produce plays of local interest.

This summer, Dennis Salter, a well-known and highly acclaimed teacher of dramatic arts, held a two-day conference in which the participants wrote original material which was carefully analyzed for its dramatic potential. Participants included everyone from established playwrights to complete novices, and the spirit of the group was extremely constructive.

The most common activity of the co-op is the reading of new plays by members. The members read the different roles like actors rehearsing a play for the first time. In this manner, many of the strengths and weaknesses of the script are quickly discovered.

The playwright, at the end of the reading, receives the helpful advice of the group. With this advice, plus new insight, the playwright is able to revise and strengthen their work. Often, without such painstaking analysis, a promising play would never reach production quality.

The co-op works also to put on dramatists' workshops. At these, an original play is presented for public viewing and given full production with skilled actors. A director and a

dramatist put on the new play for a real audience. The plays are chosen by competition, impartial judges choose the best original plays for this full treatment. For the playwright, the experience is vastly rewarding. There is no substitute for seeing how a play must be shaped for production, and how an audience receives it.

Those interested in joining the Dramatists' Co-op should phone The Writers' Federation of Nova Scotia during office hours at 423-8116. Ask for Jim MacSwain, the Dramatists' Co-op co-ordinator. Annual fees are a modest \$25, but this fee can be waived for those who cannot afford it. □

(Matt Wilson is the Vice President of the Dramatists' Co-op.)

Neptune's Cabaret competent

By MATT WILSON

Neptune Theatre's version of the Broadway musical Cabaret is a dazzling array of dance numbers, songs and dramatic sequences.

The play is pessimistic, saying that good is weak and evil is strong. But the case is not skillfully argued, it is merely asserted. In Cabaret good individuals are matched against an evil mass movement. This is Woody Allen versus Muhammed Ali. A more convincing portrayal of good versus evil would match individuals to individuals.

The play is obviously difficult to cast and direct. From a dramatic standpoint, there is one central character.

Sally Bowles, played by Victoria Snow, has an ego as big as the sun and must be played by a superb and wildly energetic actress who is also a great singer and a fine dancer.

Snow is a woman of obvious competence, although the role does present some difficulties.

She interprets her role in a gentle

manner when screaming ego is needed. Her singing is good, but her voice does not belt out songs. Her dancing is good, but her body does not express the joy of exhibition which the role demands.

There are a number of splendidly played supporting roles. Plaudits especially to Maurice Godin, the Emcee, and Bruce Clayton as Clifford Bradshaw.

Without a superstar as the female lead, the play does not scintillate. But Neptune has done a good job, and the play is worth seeing.

There are 18 songs in the play, most of them with dance. The numbers are well performed, and

like a good LP, most of them are fun to listen to and watch. There's much glitter and glamour in this enjoyable show.

Neptune is prudent to be presenting a well accepted and proven musical to the Halifax audience. A few minutes of viewing will reveal that the Broadway musical format poses grave financial risks—the cast is huge, sets and costumes are lavish. Neptune could not afford such a high-stakes gamble on a new or relatively unknown play.

Cabaret is playing at the Neptune Theatre in Halifax. For information on showtimes, ticket prices and availability, call the Box Office at 429-7070. □

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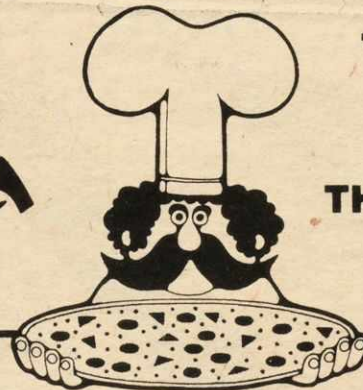
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