

ARTS

Phoenix Theatre appeals to the masses - in vain

Mass Appeal
Phoenix Theatre
November 17 - 28

by Grant Littke

This play has potential. Great potential. Written as a comedy, the play focuses on the relationship between Mark Dolson (played by Stephen Ouimette), a young Catholic deacon studying for the priesthood and Father Tim Farley (played by Thomas Peacocke), a middle-aged priest acting as Dolson's teacher.

Dolson is naively unaware of church and seminary politics is committed to an idealistic view of the role of a priest, and of the kinds of issues a priest can safely address, and is bisexual (although now celibate). Father Farley is a very complacent and comfortable priest more concerned with being liked by his parishioners and his monsignor than with addressing burning spiritual and social issues.

While employing some hilarious one-liners, the play touches on the themes of a priest's relationship with his congregation, and the sexual mores of the Catholic Church. Both themes are interesting, topical, and worthy of exploration.

Mass Appeal, however, proves to be completely inadequate to the tasks that it defines for itself. The playwright (Bill C. Davis) seems incapable of deciding whether this is a slapstick comedy or a serious social drama. The end product doesn't work on either level. Further, the play does not even remotely do justice to either of the themes that it introduces.

The play opens with Dolson arriving in the middle of one of Father Farley's "dialogue sermons" and committing an unpardonable sin in Farley's eyes - challenging a priest in front of

his congregation. Upon meeting in private the two scream at each other a lot and trade a few one-liners before Farley gets down to the business of teaching Dolson that a priest, if he is to be liked, must always ponder to the lowest common denominator in his congregation. Dolson's view that sermons should challenge the congregation spiritually and socially is not acceptable in Farley's parish.

The plot carries on in this vein (without really going anywhere) until near the end of the first act when the audience is informed that Dolson has previously engaged in bisexual activity. The rector of his seminary (and Farley's monsignor) is questioning Dolson's suitability for the priesthood on this basis. Why this theme is necessary to the play is never made clear, and the two themes are never properly integrated let alone fully explored.

From this point on, Dolson and Farley alternately love and hate one another with all the subtlety of two tigers locked in the same cage, as they do battle with the seminary rector. The play becomes as inane as one of Father Farley's sermons, descending at some points to the level of a television sitcom. The pacing is all wrong, the transitions between "light" and "serious" scenes are clumsy and disjointed, and the characters are scarcely credible.

One scene in the second act involving inebriated Father Farley ("I think best when I'm drunk") trying to save Dolson's career is so badly written and acted that it was painful to watch.

The acting also has its flaws. Maybe they are just prisoners of a bad script but both Ouimette and Peacocke looked wooden and awkward. They tended to scream at a decibel level at least twice as high as necessary, and any

attempts at emotion or sensitive character portrayal seem forced. Some of their one-liners are delivered well but as my companion remarked afterwards, "Everything in this play is sacrificed for a good line".

In the end, I felt frustrated that a play that tried to deal with such interesting topics could fail so completely to live up to its potential.

One of the bright spots in the performance

was the set design by Allan Stichbury. The sets work well in giving a flexible setting to the different scenes of the play.

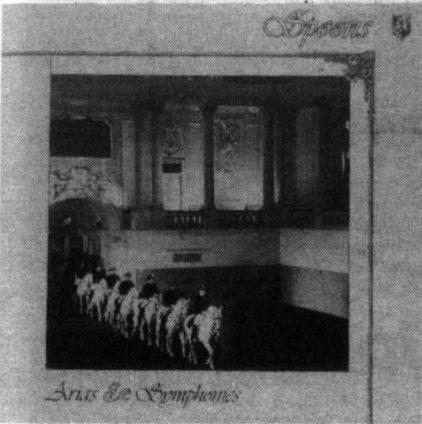
Phoenix artistic director Bob Baker came on-stage after the performance to appeal to the audience to send their friends in order to fill the half-empty theatre. Sorry, Mr. Baker, but I won't be sending any of my friends until Phoenix stages a better product than Mass Appeal.



photo by Bill Inglee

Thomas Peacocke and Stephen Ouimette in Mass Appeal, now showing at the Phoenix

Spoons dishing out electropop



by Dave Cox

The Spoons' tunes have been described as "high-tech Europop," "pragmatic pop that's not mindless," and "dance ragout"; but their music defies simple categorization. Modern, upbeat, rhythmical, it maintains a lyrical sense and each song has a message.

They are not by any stretch of the imagination a "political" band; more a "social analysis" band. An optimistic tone flows through their latest album *Arias and Symphonies* and yet they also manage to single out issues, like the sterility of modern relationships.

This is apparent in songs like "One in Ten Words," which is about the difficulty lovers have communicating:

One in ten words will reach you
Percentages say
One in ten words will get through

The album is mostly "electrobeat" dance music, though. It's fun to listen to, and "It's got a good beat and you can dance to it—I give it a nine outa ten."

The Spoons will be playing at Lucifer's November 22-24, and if you can't make it to see them, the concert is being broadcast live on CKRA 96.

The group's members are: Bass player and Vocalist Sandy Horne, 21; Drummer and Percussionist Derrick Ross, 21; 17-year-old Synthesizer whiz Rob Preuss, who has been called the "kinetic keyboard kid"; and Guitarist and Lead singer Gordon Deppe, 23, who also holds a degree in psychology.

Deppe called Tuesday from the band's hometown, Burlington, Ontario, and talked to the *Gateway*.

Gateway: You've been compared to everyone from Roxy Music to Classix Nouveaux— how do you see yourselves now?

Deppe: Well, first of all I should try and explain how we're different from them— it's true we don't sound Canadian, but we didn't consciously try to sound European or British. Our sound just evolved from the progressive stuff like Genesis we were doing before, but added a danceable rhythm.

We have the same roots as the European bands— we used to listen to Genesis, Vandergraaf Generator. Our main emphasis still lies on melody and harmony, the rhythm is added last. It's not like these bands that start with a rhythm box and build layers of sound over top, like "Da da da" (by Trio).

John Punter, our producer, (who has also produced Brian Ferry, Roxy Music, and Japan) introduced us to the rhythm machine. He'd never heard us live before producing us— his main input was to stretch us out, rather than trying to compress it all together, which is what we'd been trying to do on our first album (*Stick Figure Neighborhood*).

Gateway: How is the band planning to evolve musically in the future?

Deppe: When we started out we thought that as a group matured it got more complex. We started out playing Genesis-type progressive rock which was already quite complex. Over the years we've learned that as a band matures it learns how to appreciate simplicity. Simple things have a virtue of their own.

Electropop is kind of shallow— we'd like to explore some different atmospheres. We tried to get a more human sound.

Gateway: Your songs on *Arias and Symphonies* seem to deal a lot with the emptiness of modern relationships, yet you're still optimistic. Do you think you're changing people's minds, their outlooks?

Deppe: That's the whole purpose of everything I write. We try to express some really human feelings. We take simple ideas about human relationships, and blow them all out of proportion, or present old ideas in new ways. "Nova Heart"'s theme is that there's something bigger beyond all this; "Symmetry" is about how good and bad things balance out if life.

Gateway: Along the same vein, you describe how in the title cut on the new album, classical music is used as an analogy for strictly predetermined roles in society. The song asks you to throw out the 'script' or 'score' and improvise, explore. Does that philosophy guide your music as well?

Deppe: It puts down things that are predetermined, and praises things that are spontaneous. We try hard to do things unconventionally. But there's always a meaning underneath, we always have a deeper purpose. Have you read the lyrics?

Gateway: Yes, you seem like a lyricist's band, which is something I really appreciated.

Deppe: I liked listening to the old Genesis albums, and there was always a lyric sheet included. Part of the fun was interpreting the lyrics.

The Spoons have a videocassette of "Nova Heart" out now. They use a lot of geometric shapes and films in their stage show to complement the music with a visual concept.

Their new album has been released in America, the UK, parts of Europe, and even Australia. They're planning to follow up the album with this tour and "just try and make it a success."

Teaching Positions

Personnel from the
Edmonton Catholic School Board
will be interviewing
teacher applicants for the
1983-84 school term
on campus at the
Canada Employment Centre
on the following days:

JANUARY 10, 1983 -

JANUARY 14, 1983

JANUARY 17, 1983 -

JANUARY 21, 1983

Interested applicants should contact Miss Louise Perkins at the Canada Employment Centre (432-4291) for an application form.