

## Henson brings experience to Major Barbara

interview by Kevin Law

**J**eremy Henson is an actor with definite opinions, and he's not afraid to expound them effusively.

Starring as Adolphus Cusins in the current Citadel production of George Bernard Shaw's brightest and most provocative play, *Major Barbara*, Henson spoke exuberantly about theatre over breakfast at Marlowe's in the lofty orange building called the Citadel.

An expatriate Brit, Henson is a third generation actor. His father, a stage actor now in his 70s, is still a member of the National Theatre of Great Britain, and his mother is a musical actress, now retired.

Only after moving to Canada did Henson decide to join the profession, first attending the Banff School of Fine Arts for a summer. "After that, I was invited to audition for Ryerson Theatre School, and I studied there four years," he said, adding, "although the acting bug is in my veins, so to speak, I did it on my own after moving to Canada. All my theatre training is Canadian."

Henson has worked at the Shaw and Stratford festivals, and he feels fortunate to have done so, admitting it was good training, "because you see a lot of mistakes made; in that sense, it's a good learning experience." His view on such festivals, however, are pointed, and not all meritorious. "That doesn't mean to say anything that has the Shaw or Stratford festival label on them are worthy of great praise," Henson explained. "In fact, very often the opposite, but for most young actors, it is very good to be exposed to that, because you develop your own personal taste in what is considered to be good acting."

Henson had much to say about the current production of *Major Barbara* that he is involved in. In most of Shaw's plays, Henson believes there is usually one character who is most likely an exposition of the playwright's persona, but in *Major Barbara*, Shaw "argues from everyone's



Jeremy Henson, appearing in the Citadel's production of *Major Barbara*, is a veteran of the Shaw and Stratford festivals.

perspective," Henson said. "It's really hard to pinpoint Shaw in any one character." Henson also felt it is the most interesting script he's worked on in a long time. "One gets so immersed in the language, when you hear it, there's barely a word wasted."

But wasteful words are not in order, especially for contemporary audiences. Thus, Henson paradoxically concedes 40 minutes have been cut from the original script. "Shaw loved to overstate cases," Henson explains. "His repetitions were repetitious. Instead of having three or four nouns, he'll have eight. The things that don't move the play forward were removed, but the cuts we've necessitated haven't cut out any essential philosophies or moral viewpoints." At just under three hours long, it may be for the best. "We feel we've concentrated the play a little more for contemporary audiences," Henson said.

Verbosity aside, Henson has great respect for Shaw's themes. He considers Shaw classical and intransigent, as opposed to many modern playwrights. "Sam Shephard, for example, is a wonderful playwright. He demands enormous passion and enormous resources of energy to do his plays, but it's hard to say if 100 years from now his issues will still be current. What Shakespeare writes about is a universality of people; the same with Shaw, and I think people will be literally blown away by the timeliness of his arguments."

Concerning the city of champions, Henson has high praise for Edmonton and the Citadel. "I've always felt I've done my best work here," he said. Citing a performance in a Rice stage production called *Entertaining Mr. Sloane*, Henson described his most noteworthy experience of acclaim. A scene where he brutally kicks a character repeatedly in the gut brought a concerned reaction from a lady in the audience, who admonished him to "leave that nice old man alone", while she attempted to climb on stage. "Afterward, she came backstage and apologized... but for her to suspend her disbelief and have the play become real, that's the highest praise an actor can have."

Entertainment, then, is an obvious key to The Razorbacks' success. "We saw it as a form of juggling," Kenny explained. "Entertainment is important to us. While playing in the street, we would laugh, patter, and get people involved which appealed to a wide range of people," he said.

The band eventually put out a four-song EP that was heard by legendary British guitarist Chris Spedding. Hiding behind sunglasses, Spedding watched the band perform on the street. He produced the band's debut album, *Go To Town*, and it became an independent hit. Shortly thereafter, WEA picked up the album for a larger scale re-distribution, and now the band is beginning to spark interest in England and Australia.

And things have only gotten better. "The Tommy Hunter people saw us on the street," Kenny said, "and now we're regulars on The Tommy Hunter Show. We're on every second show with our own 'street smart' backdrop."

But for all their success, Kenny made it clear that the band will not be compromised. "We're still doing what we want to do; we still have very little equipment, and we're not going to jump on any bandwagon," he said, adding, "we haven't had a day off in a long time, but we don't mind because it's not really work, it's play."

Judging by their attitude, The Razorbacks' upcoming performance at Dinwoodie should be a hog-wild good time.

## Deathtrap returns to the stage

interview by Grant Winton

**S**o what do you do if the play you're performing requires that your characters be strangled, clubbed to death, and shot with a crossbow? "You really start to worry about the safety of your actors," says Richard Winnick, director of Ira Levin's *Deathtrap*, which opens this Wednesday at the Walterdale Theatre.

Ted Kosma, who plays Clifford Anderson in this popular play, which has already appeared as a movie starring Michael Caine and Christopher Reeve, takes a different view: "The killings are great fun," he says "We haven't lost an actor yet."

*Deathtrap* is Walterdale's second offering of the season, and is creating a lot of work for the theatre's volunteer cast and crew, who are all in the business purely for their love of theatre. Winnick, for example, is a clinical psychologist by profession, but has been devoting all his evenings (sometimes until four in the morning) to ensure the success of *Deathtrap*. And successful it will be, judging from the plot. This play has more twists and turns than a Honda driving Groat Road in the middle of winter.

Winnick is new to the Walterdale, his only previous work there being last season's *Evening of One-Acts*. But he is no stranger to the stage, having directed such big name plays as *The Prime of Miss Jean Brody* in Toronto, and *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* in Calgary. He is quite enjoying his work at the Walterdale, especially the parts of the job that require him to scrounge up the vast array of weapons needed for *Deathtrap*. "People are starting to look at the members of the crew in a funny way now, they're enjoying these weapons so much."

Kozma is a local actor who has been seen before in the Walterdale's *Lady Audley's Secret* and the Citadel's *Teen Fest*. He is very pleased to be working at the Walterdale and sees the theatre as a place for audiences to watch up-and-coming talent that will some day be on larger stages and the screen. He too accentuates *Deathtrap's* plot twists and murders as making a fine evening's entertainment.

*Deathtrap* runs from November 2nd to 12th at the Walterdale Theatre, 10322-83rd Avenue.

## Razorbacks go hog-wild

interview by Kevin Law

**R**azorbacks: n. pl. 1. half-crazed wild hog of Southern U.S.; 2. a rock band formed in Toronto in 1986.

While it is unknown if The Razorbacks are pigs (the band that is), judging by their debut album, *Go To Town*, it is a safe bet they're wild. According to lead singer Tony Kenny, the band name is not only taken from a bovine definition, but is indicative of Southern music as well. "We did take our name from the razorback, a wild and crazy hog of the southern states," Kenny said, "but we identify our name with wild and crazy Southern music."

The Razorback appeal for wildness arises from the band's roots-based, acoustic rock and roll style that features slapping bass lines and hard cut tempos, a form that was created and perfected on the street. "We all had jobs," Kenny said of the initial Razorback beginnings, "and we all loved to play, but it took too long to book nightclubs and there were too many headaches involved; as a result, we just hit the street with minimal acoustic instruments and started playing."

That led to an appealing combination of a loose and spontaneous sound mixed with charismatic, hysterical performances that had so many people stopping in the streets of downtown Toronto to listen, that irate store owners, their entrances choked with assembled onlookers, often had to ask the band to discontinue playing. In fact, Kenny concedes, more than once the police were called.



The Razorbacks: a wild and crazy bunch of guys from the center of the universe appear at Dinwoodie this Saturday night, with expatriate Edmontonians the Pursuit of Happiness opening the show.