

# ARTS



photo Dave Chan

For ten points: how many Nylons in this picture?

## A-1 doo-wop by Dupont

The Nylons  
SUB Theatre  
Nov. 3 (until Nov. 5)

review by Michael Skeet

I have to begin this by recommending The Nylons wholeheartedly. They are doing two last shows at SUB tonight, so if you can possibly get tickets — go, go, go. A *capella* singing must require incredible patience, practise and determination. I can think of no other reason for the disappointing lack of such musical groups, at least in the popular field. The result of this drought is the same everywhere: when a good *capella* group shows up, they are almost devoured by the audience.

The Nylons are a good *capella* group. They are also four great showmen, and their opening show Tuesday night left a delirious audience shoo-wopping all the way home. These guys really lived up to their advance billing.

With only two years as a group behind them, the Nylons are as close to an overnight success as you're going to get these days. Between them, though, the individual members of the band have about forty years' stage experience, and as much of that has been acting as has been singing experience; the result is a show which is

tight, well-calculated and smoothly-paced, while at the same time displaying a loose, fun sense of humour. It is, quite frankly, a joy to watch.

A stirring collection of pop oldies forms the backbone of the Nylons' show. When performed sans instruments, the Tin-Pan Alley roots of such chestnuts as "One Fine Day", "Runaway", "Silhouettes", and even "Duke of Earl", become obvious (no, they don't do "Louie, Louie", Pity).

It is impossible to take these songs seriously, of course. Finally being able to understand the lyrics only emphasizes the point. Nevertheless, considerable effort has been lavished on the arrangements, and it is clear that the Nylons really enjoy what they're doing. Enjoy, hell! These guys are having an A-1, Down Home, Laugh-Yourself-Silly GOOD TIME! And they've been gracious enough to invite us to share. The nice thing about these moldies is that, knowing them as well as we do, we are free to let the voices become the most important thing to enjoy the original musical instrument at its very best.

This makes the show's highlight numbers all the more memorable. Tom Mann's clever mixing and use of echo make

## Sixties comic revived

Tom Foolery  
Citadel Rice Theatre  
till Nov. 15

review by I. and J. Levental

If the pen is indeed mightier than the proverbial sword then Tom Lehrer has been fighting with a double-edged blade and carving up sacred cows left, right, and centre.

Using the weapons of music and lyrics, Lehrer has waged war against sentimentality, complacency and hypocrisy, not to mention religion, politics and sex. His battlefields are the nightclubs, the theatres, and the living rooms of America — any place where the smug and comfortable gather to be entertained.

We were in the midst of feeling rather smug and comfortable ourselves while attending a revue of his songs entitled *Tom Foolery*. (Now playing at the Rice Theatre until Nov. 15). The feeling dissipated, however, as we found ourselves being immersed in Lehrer's "slightly off-centre world."

His songs deal with a wide range of subjects: pollution, sado-masochism, the nuclear arms race, venereal disease, new math, pornography, the Catholic Church, multiculturalism and drugs (to mention just a few). All are deftly deflated if not downright dismembered. Some of Lehrer's ablest satires are achieved when he parodies other musical genres such as the folk song, the Irish ballad, the love song, the Viennese waltz, the Alma Mater song and the overbearing but irresistible tango.

Lehrer reached the peak of his success somewhere in the late 50's - early 60's, and much of his music reflects the particular attitudes and social concerns of those times. Yet we did not find the subject matter or its manner of presentation outdated. *Tom Foolery* (which, by the way, was first performed in North America one year ago

by Alberta Theatre Projects in Calgary) was obviously put together very carefully in an effort to appeal to audiences of the 80's.

The material which was included in this show is still more or less relevant to the times in which we live. For example, the ode of the "Old Dope Peddler" (he gives the kids free samples/ Because he knows full well/ That today's innocent faces/ Will be tomorrow's clientele) confronts a problem not of diminishing but rather growing seriousness. And the razzamatazz finale, "We Will All Go Together," expresses a message about nuclear holocaust which should still be comforting to us all (There will be no more misery/ When the world is our rotisserie).

The performances themselves were wholly professional. The casting of each of the four performers did justice to their strong individual traits. Jack Northmore was flamboyant and campy in his "Tango," Deidre Van Winkle was expressively operatic in her rendition of "In Old Mexico," David Dunbar was thoroughly scientific in his declamation of "The Elements," and Vince Metcalfe demonstrated loving dementia in "She's My Girl."

The play's burlesque set, masterfully designed by Richard Roberts, was colourful and fresh. It was complemented by Roger Perkins' up-beat orchestration to provide an appropriate background for this energetic show.

If you have stayed with us up till now, it should have become clear that we strongly recommend *Tom Foolery*. Either way, you can't lose. Those who already have strong beliefs about politics, religion, and/or sex will no doubt be exposed to some different points of view. And those lucky few who are completely unopinionated in these areas will quickly have that situation remedied.

the old Drifters hit "Up on the Roof" into some sort of urban anthem. And even though the timbre of the lead was just a touch off, the Nylons' version of "The Lion Sleeps Tonight" (remember The Tokens?) was absolutely astounding.

I've mentioned Tom Mann already. His name bears repeating, because special effects play such an important part in the Nylons' show. It's the lighting and mixer effects, for example, that provide the edge to Laura Nyro's "Eli's Coming" (the lighting man's name is Falconer; and I'm sorry, mate, but I didn't get the first name).

Oh, yeah. Names. I haven't told you who these guys are yet. Well, two are native Canadians, the other two Americans living in Toronto. Their names are Marc Connors, Claude Morrison, Paul Cooper and Arnold Robinson. Do yourselves a favour and remember those names.

## Literary Supplement

Friday is the last day and this is the last notice: send your literary masterpieces, breathtaking photos, heart-rending poems, illustrious illustrations, and knee-slapping cartoons to *Gateway*, Room 282, SUB. If you don't, it won't be our fault if you don't become a rich and famous artiste.

## An esoteric novel of academia

The Rebel Angels  
Robertson Davies  
MacMillan of Canada

review by Geoffrey Jackson

Robertson Davies is a writer who commands respect and, as far as I'm concerned, admiration. With a clean style and lucid thought he is very good by any standard, not just by that miserly one, "good for a Canadian." So when I heard that, at long last, Davies had written a new novel I was quick to jolly the generous souls at New Century Books into lending me a copy.

Is this Robertson Davies greatest work? No, I'm afraid it hasn't quite the stature of *Fifth Business* but it still is a fine book.

*The Rebel Angels* is set within the fictional and highly gothic College of St. John and the Holy Ghost, placed somewhere near Toronto. The tale that unfolds there is told from two viewpoints: Maria Theotoky, the beautiful and brilliant graduate student of medievalism, and Father Simon Darcourt, a portly professor of Greek.

All sorts of things happen: A rich

eccentric art collector leaves an enormous rats nest of valuable junk to the College. Maria is in love with Clem Hollier, her professor and a leading authority in paleopsychology. Father Darcourt is in love with Maria. A rare manuscript is missing, and the nasty Professor McVarish is under suspicion. Behind everything stands the evil and discredited Professor of Philosophy Parlabane (a defrocked monk).

Needless to say this is the most baroque plot Davies has ever created, but he knows so much about what he writes that it all comes off quite handsomely. The key thing that distinguishes this work from, say, the *Deptford Trilogy* is its tone.

*Fifth Business* and the rest of the trilogy had a definite Victorian flavour. Prim, starched, and dignified, though never to an extreme, they told their stories to great effect. In *The Rebel Angels* Davies is concerned with the medieval character of his university and he fills his story with the sort of bawdiness and vulgarity one expects of Chaucer, or more pointedly, Rabelais. The effect is sometimes nothing short of grotesque.

How else but grotesque would you describe Professor Froat's scientific

fascination with human excrement? Or Parlabane's lusty delight in the joys of pederasty? (This is not a book for the overly delicate).

But while such medieval delights may seem strange coming from Davies they do give the work an undeniable energy. I'm not so far removed from my dark age ancestors that I can deny my fascination for this weird stuff.

And Davies is Davies, which means, intelligent dialogue, clever wit, and the accurate slash of satire. A source of a great deal of my admiration for Davies is that he has never been afraid to discuss serious topics and what's more, he never treats them with deadly dull reverence.

Most of the ideas in *The Rebel Angels* will be quite familiar to Davies fans. He still delights in Jungian psychology and you do not have to be an analyst to spot the archetypes and mythic motifs in the work. There is an old woman with magical powers, a very demonic monk, not to mention a mythical description of higher education.

Davies sees teachers as being like the rebel angels who fell from heaven because they dared to teach forbidden knowledge to

man.

If the book falls short of his previous work it is because the characters failed to really come alive for me. Maria is never as three-dimensional a woman as other young girls Davies has created. Nor did the book ever bring off the sort of touching, believable companionship you can find in his other work. This is not to suggest that there is anything exceptionally bad about the characterization here, it's a matter of degree. Davies has created some extremely fine characters in his career.

The ones in this book may not be as fine as the others but that still leaves them at a high level of quality. I'm always disliked critics who insist that everything a man writes must be his greatest work.

So I can definitely recommend *The Rebel Angels*. Davies has a marvelous and eccentric view on life that encompasses a great deal of wisdom. I think I perceive him in the context of that English myth that sees eccentrics as holders of a secret joy, to be revered by society. Davies has that quality, old fashioned and definitely odd but with an air of gleeful rebellion way down deep.