

Divinity Bash nine lives a disappointment

BY KARAN SHETTY

There's one line in *Divinity Bash nine lives* in which one of the characters says to the other eight, "Cheer up. You'll all be dead soon enough". It's a surprise that this line comes as late as the third act in a play which is all about the lives of nine very depressed individuals who have nowhere to turn for solace.

Divinity Bash nine lives is the new offering by Cape Breton native and dramaturge, Bryden MacDonald. The play, being staged at Neptune until Jan. 18, takes a look at the lives of nine very different urbanites who all feel that life has dealt them a bad hand.

Among other characters, Albert (Tom Barnett) is a white-collar worker who has just lost his job, Alice (Nicola Lipman) is a bondage queen who turns tricks for wealthy businessmen, and Glorious (Francisco Trujillo), is a drag queen who is deemed a freak by all those she comes into contact with.

Evangeline (Marguerite McNeil) is a mysterious beggar-woman who is the strangest and, ironically, the most centered character in the play. She seems to be the only one who has found peace in spite of all her troubles.

As the play progresses, all the characters' lives are slowly intertwined, and some of them end up finding comfort in each other.

Does playwright/director Bryden MacDonald pull off something that works here? Not in my opinion. Maybe, as an individual who is not a rabid theatre-goer, I am not qualified to make such judgments, but as an average joe who expected some recompense in the way of entertainment for three precious hours of a Saturday evening, I can honestly say that the experience was a disappointment.

The play comes off as being extremely contrived and the characters all seem like caricatures of the types of people they aspire to represent. It's like

you can see the seams of the whole production while sitting in the audience.

The acting and direction was not what dragged the play down. In fact, the acting, the transitions between scenes, and the set itself were effective at times.

The Achilles heel was the actual play itself, and by that I mean the writing.

I think I would have even enjoyed it more if MacDonald had come out and given a lecture

on the play's premise rather than stage this insipid production. Characters ramble on in long soliloquies about how society has been unjust to them to the point where you want to scream back at them how unjust it was that they made you sit through their tedious diatribes.

MacDonald obviously has a lot to say, but I think he would have been better served by writing an essay instead of staging a play. When reading a good book or

watching a powerful movie or play, you shouldn't be aware that you're doing any of these things. You should find yourself absorbed by the art itself. Art is more effective when it is layered with subtlety rather than being openly preachy.

But what really annoyed me about this play was its attempts at humour. In one scene, a character walks on stage with a tea cosy on his head instead of a chef's hat. To my greater

annoyance, people in the audience actually thought it was hilarious. This type of humour reminded me of a bad episode of Royal Canadian Air Farce.

Hopefully this inauspicious start to 1998 for Neptune Theatre does not augur a bad year for the establishment. It is obvious that Bryden MacDonald was wearing his heart on his sleeve when he wrote this play, and it's a pity that it just didn't work.

Ecstasy well worth the confusion

Ecstasy

Irvine Welsh

Vintage

Irvine Welsh has done it again. *Ecstasy* is to ecstasy what his previous book, *Trainspotting*, is to heroin.

The book is divided into three short stories: "Lorraine Goes To Livingston", "Fortune's Always Hiding", and "Undeclared". They are not connected except for the presence of ecstasy users. Each story starts off with about five seemingly unrelated characters who gradually come together through unexpected twists. The first two stories are disappointing, in that ecstasy played a very minor role. However, both conclude brilliantly.

The third story gave me the glimpse of the English drug culture that I had been waiting for. The main character, Lloyd, is a 30-year-old addict with ecstasy as his latest drug of choice.

It is important to mention that ecstasy is a drug that gives the user an "endless" supply of energy and increases the body's temperature and sensitivity. The next day, most ecstasy users crash, as their energy has been spent. The drug was introduced to North America more than ten years ago and is associated with the rave culture.

The book should probably come with a warning label because it contains some pretty graphic material. I wasn't really bothered

because I am desensitized to most things. The book contains sex (nothing wrong with that), anal sex with little boys and girls (very offensive, but not uncommon in literature) and a sexual affair with a sheep (pretty sick stuff).

And then there are the chapters involving Freddy, a character that likes sex with whips, chains and dead bodies. The material would be tolerable if it were only mentioned in passing. However, the incidents are described in detail and are actually major plot elements.

An additional gripe I have with

the book is the language it uses. All of the characters' dialogue and thoughts are written in heavy English and Scottish dialects. The accents add to the mood and atmosphere, but some of the wit is lost.

"Amber's saying she's intae firing intae ye, ah tell Ally" is one example. You know what it means (Amber wants to have sex with Ally), but it would be much easier if it were clearly written.

On the other hand, the book is clever, well-written and original. Part of a story is told through a novel one of the characters is

writing. It is also surprisingly easy to follow, despite all the characters and subplots.

The best indication of the value of any book is the reader's interest. At the very least, this book is compelling enough not to put down.

Given Welsh's track record for having his books made into movies, my advice is to wait until *Ecstasy* hits theatres. It would be far better for two reasons: you could listen to the accents rather than read them, and Iggy Pop will be blaring in the background.

CHRIS DAY

Folk with a little bit of a twist

No...Signal Hill is NOT a celtic band

BY DAVE MACDONALD

Saturday night at the Lower Deck saw the boys from St. John's, Newfoundland take the stage. No, it wasn't Great Big Sea, but Signal Hill.

This band from the Rock has been together for a little under six years and have released a live album, which you can find around the city. They're going to be very busy in the next year. Besides touring, they are hoping to release at least two, maybe three, new albums.

The trio (who, on this night were a quartet) is made up of the father and son duo of Jim Lamb (guitar, harmonica, vocals) and Paul Lamb (12-string guitar, lead vocals), and friend, Jason Meadus (bass, vocals). But, for a while they will have Cory Tetford helping out with most of the vocals and bluesy guitar playing. Tetford is another Newf, from Grand Falls, who just finished

helping the Irish Descendents with their upcoming CD.

The reason for having Tetford sitting in is because Paul's voice was exhausted (some say from overwork, but, Jason said it was "because he drank too much over the holidays").

While I was sitting at the packed Lower Deck bar, listening to the piped-in music of Great Big Sea and Ashley MacIsaac, the band took to the stage.

I didn't know what to expect from Signal Hill, this being my first exposure to them. They tuned up, greeted the crowd, and started to play. What's that I hear? Is that "Cotton Fields" by CCR? Wow! Next came some Buffalo Springfield, then some Pink Floyd. I was not expecting this! What a way to get a pub singing and in a good mood.

Paul said that they like to do tunes that people would react by

saying, "Shit, I don't remember the last time I heard this song!". But they still play the songs that have to be played in a Halifax pub: "Sonny's Dream", "Drunken Sailor", and "Barrett's Privateers".

Just from watching them perform, you can tell that these guys love playing music in front of people, and for its own sake.

From meeting them, they are good fellows with good Newfie hearts. They were more than happy to sit with me while I asked them boring questions, and they were even nice enough to answer them.

So, if you're in the mood to see a band having fun and playing good classic rock tunes with an acoustic-folk twist, then this is definitely your band.

Signal Hill will be playing at the Thirsty Duck this weekend, and the next time they'll be at the Lower Deck will be from January 26th to January 31st.

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