

Possessed by Valdy

by Glenn Walton

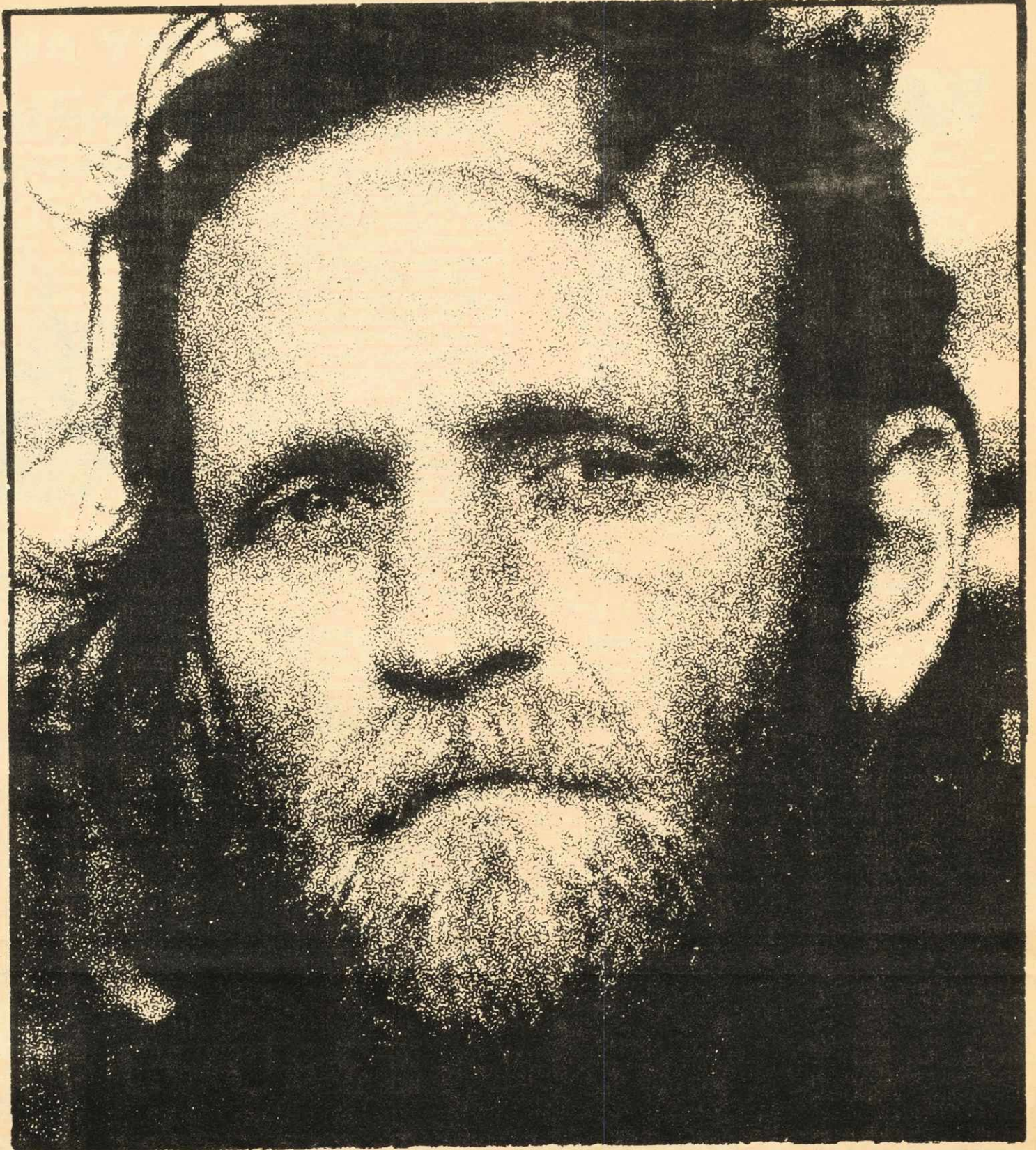
Theory Number One: Valdy, the fuzzy bard with the wry wit, is a regular guy, just like you and me, playin' and pickin' straightforward songs about love, the country life, and the environment. Give him a couple of acres of land, a woman and a guitar, and he's happy. No frills or pretensions about him; why he could be anyone's neighbor. . . .

Theory Number Two: Valdy is a phony and rides around in old trucks for the camera when he's raking in the dough faster than he can count it. Country life's alright for the rich, who don't have to farm the land. Why, when the weather's bad he can just fly off to California and record another of those psychedelic things he's taken to recently, trying to break into bigger markets, selling out in the process. . . .

Theory Number Three: Valdy is actually a gay Martian bureaucrat in disguise, flown in to plant a deadly virus among the population of Western Canada. When the country is thus decimated, he and the other hairies will descend en masse and establish colonies along the B.C. coast. . . .

I'll tell you a secret: I'd never heard of Valdy until a few weeks before I saw him at the Cohn, and was thus afforded a unique opportunity to react spontaneously to what appears to be a Canadian institution of sorts. The image-makers love labels that allow them to conveniently ignore the music their objects produce. Sure Frank Sinatra hangs out with the Mafia, but he wasn't a bad singer, you know. Who thinks of Beethoven's mishandling of his domestics when listening to the Eroica? It is true that we mustn't let ourselves be blinded to the more serious tergiversations of musicians, Wagner's anti-Semitism being the most glaring example, but neither should the extramusical aspects be allowed to obscure the music.

It's been a long time since I stood or sang at someone else's concert; having lived in Germany, where standing ovations are few and far between, and practically have to be wrung out of the audience. Valdy, however, looking indeed like a 'regular guy', guitar strung around his neck as if he'd worn it all his life, had no such troubles. The rapport with the thousand-plus crowd that was obvious from the beginning, got, if anything, better as the evening wore on. By the end he had them singing and stamping and bringing him back for more. Here was a folksinger in the real sense of the word, singing to his audience, and not at it, and reaping the kind of reaction other less charismatic entertainers can only



envy.

Warnings about a "new Valdy", a performer who had shed his former musical skin and was now playing hard rock, were unfounded. The program was a balanced, surprisingly wide-ranging blend of popular musical form (including rock) meeting in the principle figure of a versatile six-person band. Country, Jugband, rock, Tin Pan Alley, blues and folk merged in Valdy's light baritone that at times showed

unexpected flexibility and strength. The ability to tie all these contrasting musical elements into a homogeneous style was the main surprise and pleasure of the evening. It is a sign of his talent that he can remind one of any number of different singers at the same time, and still remain himself.

Whether half-drawling, half-singing about the joys of country life, playing light little ditties closer to the vaudeville hall than the barn, or warning

in apocalyptic pentatonic about the dangers of nuclear waste (in 'Hot Rocks', from the album of the same name, and one of the better selections of the evening), Valdy pulled it off without straining the common musical bond too far. In this he reminded me of none less than the Beatles, who mastered a similarly wide range of musical idioms in their musical development, incorporating and synthesizing new ones as they went.

Valdy possesses that gift, a fact that augers well for his musical future. His incorporation of rock elements into his music, as far as it went, signifies less a break with the past than his growth as an artist. If he loses fans down on the farm for it, that is his choice: his music has gained as a result. So you see, he could be a Martian or a phony or a genuine Whole Earth father for all I care, as long as he keeps on playing.

Ambitious production successful

by Eric Simpson

The Dalhousie Drama Society's presentation of Dr. Faustus at King's Theatre last week was an ambitious undertaking that succeeded in being professional while at the same time retaining the exuberance of an amateur production.

Ron Huebert skillfully directed Marlowe's 16th century tragedy so that even the most modern of minds could follow Faust's intrigues in the art of necromancy.

The enigmatic figure of Faustus is in constant struggle with the luciferian forces of death and evil during the play.

However David MacLeod's interpretation of Faustus enables us to appreciate the spirit and vivacity of what could have been a morose character. No doubt the presence of the seven deadly sins helped him to avoid the morbid contemplation of his fate.

The production's concentration on comic relief and frivolity did detract somewhat from a full appreciation of the tragic element of the play. Drunken revelry and leg-pulling provided the audience with entertainment and

amusement but at the detriment of a more profound insight into the ultimate destiny of man. MacLeod excelled in Faustus' long dramatic monologue at the end of the play, unfortunately it was the only such occasion he had to display his oratorical talents.

The supporting cast was uniformly commendable; Ray Doucette gave a sterling performance as Mephistophilis; Hugh A. Corston was masterful in all three of his roles; Glenn Walton exhibited fine elocution and voice control as

the old man; Jim Moreira was impressive in both his singing and acting; and Glenn Levy gave an especially effective performance as Robin.

Although this contemporary Dr. Faustus may have lost some of its classical meaning, it made up for it in flow and pure fun. From the point of view of attendance (the play was sold out every night) and the reaction of the cast and audience, this venture was an enjoyable and rewarding experience.