

# ARTS & CULTURE

## One bad mother

BY AVI LAMBERT

She was one bad mother. She scratched, she screamed and she just plain tweaked.

*The House of Bernarda Alba* was the latest play put on by the Dalhousie Theatre Department. The program reads "a Drama about the Women who Live in the Villages of Spain (1936)". The play was cast exclusively with women as the program entails. But, except for the flamenco and the adobe lookin' set, I didn't get the feeling I was watching Spanish culture until the end of the play.

When I sat down before the proverbial curtain was raised I was intrigued. There was no curtain, the theatre walls were made of cloth, and the set itself was so close to the audience it felt as if the play was about to take place in my living room. By the end of the play though, the room felt much larger than it had when I sat down.

The play, written by Federico

Garcia Lorca, is centred on a volatile premise: how do a stern matron and her six daughters deal with the death of a father?

The generation gap between mother and daughter fuels the play's tension. Added to this is the fact that the girls aren't allowed to leave the house — as in most tragedies, this provided an impetus for love and hate.

I have described the body of the play yet I haven't described its beauty. The girls could have left the house physically, if not for fear of their mother Bernarda.

Bernarda Alba, the matron of the house, ruled with an iron fist. More than that she ruled with a spiked tongue, and a mind unwilling to accept or acknowledge things that would otherwise drive her mad.

The love triangle created between Martirio, Angustias and Adela was powerful at times, and at others times funny. Sarah Duffy turned the character of Adela into a

ball of sexual energy that burned brightly as the climax of the love triangle — concluding in her suicide — peaked.

The combination of the sister's differing personalities was great. Sultry, withdrawn, and selfish. Jillian Theriault was perfect in her role as Magdalena, an outgoing, gossip-loving spaz. It was no wonder she was called the hyena by her grandmother in the play.

The maids and the lunatic grandmother were perfect foils to the madness and precise obliviousness of Bernarda.

But Kelly Pike did a outstanding job as Bernarda Alba. I was riveted and scared at points. In short, I actually dreaded her appearance on stage.

With a dash of hamminess, an intriguing set and some powerful



The House of Bernarda Alba by the Dalhousie Theatre Department.

photo by Tarek Abouarzin

acting by the main characters, I was pleased. I laughed with sociopathic glee when, after her daughter's suicide, Bernarda assured the audience everything was going to be hunky-dory.

I don't know about that, but I know the next Dalhousie Theatre Department production will be something to look forward to.

## Dracula's voice bigger than his words

BY JANET FRENCH

With a copious amount of imported talent from major musicals in Toronto, the Neptune Theatre kick-started this year's season with the world premiere of *Dracula — A Chamber Musical*. And this musical adaption of Bram Stoker's *Dracula* proves to be an interesting performance.

The musical brings the gothic story that we're all familiar with to life, with the expected dose of crucifixes and stakes driven through hearts. Indeed, the idea of a singing Dracula was entirely cheesy, and the performance was rather melodramatic, but perhaps such melodrama is necessary to accurately recount this morbid tale.

The music is the most

commendable aspect of the show, in both its composition and performance. The cast is a vocally talented one, with huge operatic voices that blew me out of my seat. Marek Norman's musical score is beautiful, powerful and leaves you humming the tunes on the way home from the theatre.

"But what of the acting?" you ask. This is where the show is most lacking. It appears that the imported talent from Toronto has focussed so much on their vocal skills that acting ability has been put on the backburner. None of the cast appear to be into their characters as much as they were into the singing, with one exception. Nova Scotia's own Cliff Le Jeune allows himself to be brilliantly consumed by his twisted character, Renfield. But, in their

defense, all the actors were given a difficult script to work with as the lyrics, written by Richard Ouzounian, are relatively corny and simplistic — often, one was able to predict the next line a character was to sing, for it was all mindlessly constructed rhyming. It was hard for the players to appear as though they weren't "acting".

The set itself is cleverly constructed to fit the fairly sparse space on Neptune's Fountain Theatre stage. But there is a definite tension between the size of the stage and theatre and the spaces that these performers are used to working with. The blocking is rather stagnant, for there is nowhere for the actors to move. Perhaps it is confusing for the performers to be so close to the audience, which

could account for their huge voices but sub-par acting.

Overall, the performance was not as impressive as I anticipated. There is a definite sense of imbalance between many aspects of this performance, like the fantastic music with the uninspired lyrics. I suggest that Richard Ouzounian, host of the CBC Radio 2 show *Say it With Music*, stick to his day job.

Also, the burning question remains of why Neptune felt it was necessary to hire most of the cast from Toronto rather than our own local pool of talent. This selection is not only insulting, but it undermines the talents of Maritime artists.

*Dracula — A Chamber Musical* runs at Neptune Theatre until Nov. 8

## Enjoy life and music with Guy Davis

BY CHRISTOPHER ST. PIERRE LOCKE

Last Friday and Saturday Guy Davis packed Bearly's, a place for true blues just off the beaten path on Barrington.

On Friday the bar was full, with a diverse crowd of all ages, all anticipating the show they were about to see. You couldn't move through the place.

I found out by catching a glimpse of one of the many photos on the wall that Davis had played at Bearly's before. It was around a quarter to ten that I finally got a chance to get a few words with him.

When I asked Davis about the scene here he said he finds the

people "really nice, friendly and enthusiastic".

This is coming from a man who, with his guitar, has travelled from his native New York all the way to Australia and back around the nation. Davis cited Blind Willie McTell, Robert Johnson and Skip James as some of his major influences. But as to his style, he coolly said he had "a little bit of everything".

After I talked to Davis, I stayed to watch his show. Let me just say it was beautiful. As soon as he began to strum his guitar, his voice ran deep and raspy and ricocheted off the brick walls creating a comfortable atmosphere of warmth and soul.

He got audience participation on a few songs. Everyone seemed to enjoy themselves. There was a real down home feeling — I can't say I know the exact definition of the expression, but it sounds suitable.

He then unleashed the harp on "You Don't Know My Mind", which became a tasty combo of sweet and sour.

His acoustic guitar hooks pulled the listener along like bait on a lure, while the soothing harmonica melodies rang through the thick air.

Davis had the crowded audience of Bearly's in the palm of his hand — with the exception of a few luses in the back.

Bearly's offers a quaint little scene on the lower south side of Barrington street. When I asked people where Bearly's was, many unfortunately had no idea. I heard from a few it was just a little dive, which is not the case at all. Bearly's is actually a cool, clean bar, with great deals on drinks, a wall with photographs in ode to the musicians who played there, and, of course, a perfect blend of old and new blues tunes playing in the background to create a real beer drinkin', foot stompin' good time.

Ultimately it was a satisfying experience and I definitely recommend anyone to find a Guy Davis CD or, at the very least, check out the Bearly's Blues scene.

**THURSDAY, OCT. 15**  
**INLAND**

**FRIDAY, OCT. 16**  
**P.F. STATION**

**SATURDAY, OCT. 17**  
**SNAPDRAGONS**  
W/ COPING & KID TWIST

**THURSDAY, OCT. 22**  
**BILL DAWE**  
& THE GROOVE FETISH

**FRI. & SAT., OCT. 23-24**  
**RED**  
(formerly UISCE BEATHA)

**THURSDAY, OCT. 29**  
**NATHAN'S FLAT**

**FRIDAY, OCT. 30**  
**ARLIBIDO**

**SATURDAY, OCT. 31**  
**PAINTING DAISIES**

**COVER CHARGES**  
**\$2 THURSDAYS**  
**\$3 FRIDAYS**  
**\$5 SATURDAYS**

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