

# Not Broadway yet, but..

By NANCY KEMPTON  
Brunswickan Staff

The UNB Art Centre stage was alive with humour that actually inspired real laughter when the reading of *A Rope Against the Sun*, followed by the comedy sketch, *The Real Inspector Hound* were performed last week.

*A Rope Against the Sun*, involved seven artists from Theatre Fredericton, who merely sat on stools lining the forward stage and spoke their lines from the paperback version of the play they all held in hand. However it appeared that many of the performers were not reading the words at all. Most of the parts were so well rehearsed they suggested overtones of ad lib.

The script was a day in the life of a tiny, isolated Newfoundland village. The thoughts, fears leaning to phobias, quiet prejudices, yearnings and fantasies of the village folk were displayed in speech and facial expressions of the actors. They approached the reading in a surreal style, flowing from soliloquy into narration into direct conversation between characters. The ease with which they mastered the true personality of each

not a polished performance and there several gaps in the flow of action. However, taken in its proper context it was a fun play, which even the mistakes were enjoyable to witness. The context to which I refer is an amateur production with limited resources of time and experience. For, according to the program, "UNB Workshop Productions is composed of students of English 2140. The course is an introduction to the principles of drama production."

While I may disagree with the slight overstatement on the advertising posters written by "rent a good review"...it certainly was one of the most sincere efforts to accomplish the difficult tasks of a comic performance I have seen. Although the actors were no doubt trembling in utter anguish of performing on stage, their outward appearance only revealed enjoyment at making the audience laugh. Do not misconstrue my meaning, I am not defending a sadly lacking performance under the syrup of pity and compassion for the brave souls who tried so hard but just didn't have what it takes. As I said, all the show lacked was polish and experience. The

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character is demonstrated by the fact that one person, Mike Ireton, portrayed both the Catholic priest, Father and the town drunk Joe Casey.

I especially enjoyed the acid humour of ole Jake Connors—the ornary seq captain with a mouth not quite foul enough to be offensive, only barroom funny. The selfish depression of Nell Pittman, destined to mind her bedridden father and dream of lovers never to arrive, was effectively seen in the desperate and quivering face of actress Brenda Thorneycraft.

If one is to merely sit through a reading, one will surely be disappointed. A reading, because it is not physically acted out on stage, nor does it make use of costume, props or make up, insists upon the operations of imagination from the audience. If one's imagination is alive and properly fed with a talented performance as was the case in *A Rope Against The Sun*, one will not feel cheated out of more visual aspects of a full-dressed stage.

*The Real Inspector Hound* has an honest comic appeal. It was

cast did have what it takes - talent, a lot of which remains undeveloped.

The most obvious shortcoming was timing. Timing is crucial to comedy. Conversations between the two critics, played by Joey Kilfoil and Shaun Clarke were difficult to follow on occasion as interruptions were not abrupt enough, nor witty comebacks spontaneous enough. However, both actors fared much better when on the set. The script involved two critics reviewing a play, the set for which they accidentally were drawn into and proceeded to combine the worlds of reviewer and the reviewed. Sound confusing? It was, but as mentioned the transition was handled quite effectively by the critics. Perhaps both had innate ham tendencies that only allowed their complete expressive abilities to operate when freed from the bounds of sideline seats. When the spotlight hits, a star is born.

David Renault, bounding on the stage as the neurotic, overzealous Inspector Hound,



"I don't know, it's just a feeling..." Heather Morrison, Marsha Forwood, and John Knechtel in the comedy-thriller *The Real Inspector Hound*

certainly had mastered the boisterous facet of his role. However, he was too quick to cut in with lines when silent quizzical expression would have been more appropriate. Cynthia, played by Heather Morrison, had the opposite problem. Several of her lines were not spoken with enough emphasis. She did however appear convincing as a rather nonchalant, slightly touched rich beauty. Felicity (Marsha Forwood) made good use of her clear crisp voice when it was required. Simon (Kevin White) made extremely effective use of his facial expres-

sions, sometimes, I felt, even when they were not required. Both actors, however, fell victim to the overall timing problem when involved in unrequited love interchanges.

John Knechtel and his exclamatory eyebrows were excellent in the realm of overdramatized farcical wit, the basic style of the play. However, the one character and actor who stole the play was Maggie Macpherson as Mrs. Drudge, the loud and frumpish cleaning lady. Her clumsy mannerisms and tactless comments were thrown at the audience, caus-

ing instant chuckles and outright bursts of laughter.

As a critic for the student newspaper I do not feel I should unduly praise performances simply because they are UNB creations. Nor should I hide the fact that I truly derived enjoyment and satisfaction from these productions, as was the case with *The Real Inspector Hound*. Not yet ready for Broadway, or Off-Broadway, for that matter, but the two productions at the Art Centre did justice to the local stage and the prospects of future engagements.

## Murder game script commissioned

If you have ever read a gothic thriller like *Dark Mansion* by W. E. Dan Ross, or *Fog Bound* by Clarissa Ross, or *Temple of Darkness* by Marilyn Ross, then you're familiar with the work of the most prolific writer in the world, Saint John, New Brunswick's W. E. Dan Ross.

MR. Ross, who has pared his list of 11 pseudonyms down to just 3, has produced 300 top-selling books since he began his full time writing career in 1962. The books, which are handled by several publishing companies, are translated into more than five languages and distributed world wide. They may be found anywhere that popular fiction is sold: airports, hospitals and even grocery

stores. Ross' first love is the theatre. Born in Saint John, New Brunswick, where he currently resides, he performed in high school theatricals, and very quickly decided to pursue a career on the stage. He studied acting in New York City; worked with the prestigious Provincetown Playhouse where he also rewrote old plays for the company; and founded a five person theatrical troupe which toured the Atlantic Region. During World War II he entertained troops as a member of the British Entertainment Service throughout Europe. Mr. Ross returned from the service to Saint John where he ran a film distribution company until he decided to write full time.

"It's exciting to get back to theatre after all these years and especially to be associated with Theatre New Brunswick and it's director Malcolm Black whose work I greatly admire," stated Mr. Ross.

Mr. Black, who commissioned the play after he read the theatrical thriller *Shadow Over Denby* by Marilyn Ross, said "I was so impressed by Mr. Ross' ability to create characters and the ingenuity with which he told the story. I immediately asked him to write a play for us."

The fourteenth season at Theatre New Brunswick will open in the fall of 1981 with Mr. Ross' play slated for production early in 1982 as part of that season.

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