

ENTERTAIN MEAT

Charades - an inter-racial love triangle

a new play by Kwame Dawes reviewed

by Maria Kubacki

Those of you who think that TNB is the only theatre company in town may be pleasantly surprised to find out that that's not the case - there are some alternatives. In fact, some of the most interesting theatre events have been put on right here, on this campus.

Last week, Enterprise Theatre staged Kwame Dawes' ambitious new play. Set in Jamaica in the late 1980's, *Charades* uses the play-within-a-play convention to explore some very touchy issues - the sort of issues that you're not supposed to discuss at parties (or anywhere else, for that matter). It's extremely difficult to bring politics into a play without over simplifying and resorting to cliches, but in *Charades* Dawes manages to deal with the issues of sex, class, race and religion in a sensitive and challenging way.

Charades operates on at least three different levels. On the most immediate level, three actors are presenting a dress rehearsal/preview of a play about a Christian theatre company called *Missing the Train*. A man in the audience periodically interrupts the action to object to what he perceives as dangerous elements in the play. On this level, Claire Hurley plays Elaine, a white working class actress; Karen Louison plays Pearl, a wealthy black actress; Kwame Dawes plays Walter, a black school teacher; Edet Archibong plays the stage manager and Errol Williams plays the man in the audience.

Most of the action takes place in *Missing the Train* (which is the second of the three levels). Here the focus is on the relationship between three friends as they struggle to keep their Christian theatre company together in the face of both internal and external pressures. On this level, Walter (Kwame Dawes) plays Wayne, a black actor/playwright who is going through a crisis; Elaine (Claire Hurley) plays Jennifer, a charming but somewhat naive white upper-class actress and Pearl (Karen Louison) plays Maureen, a reserved black educated professional from a working-class background. Each of the three is somehow caught between the other two in a triangle that is complicated by issues of class, race and religion. Director John

Ruganda blocked this part of the play such that the shifting power relations between the three characters could be traced in the positions each assumed vis-a-vis the other two.

The third level of *Charades* is Wayne's play-in-progress, *Birdnest Tree*, which Wayne and Jennifer are working on in *Missing the Train* (I told you it was a challenging play, didn't I?) On this level Wayne plays the dual role of Victor, a white Jamaican (who moves through the age of 10 to 65) and Simon, a brown skinned overseer, while Jennifer plays Lena, a black working-class woman (whose age ranges from 18 to 40 years). As the playwright's note for the viewer suggested, this third level is more surreal in its style than the other two.

Throughout, the audience is reminded of its audience-ness (is distanced from the story, Brechtian-fashion) as the action in *Missing the Train* (which is, I suppose, the 'centre' of Dawes' play - if the play has a centre) is broken by commentary from the actors (Elaine, Pearl and Walter) and the man in the audience.

Claire Hurley, Kwame Dawes and Karen Louison demonstrated their flexibility as

actors by moving from one level of the play to another without blurring the distinctions between each of their three (and, in Dawes' case, four) parts. They were particularly memorable as Jennifer, Wayne and Maureen in *Missing the Train*. Edet Archibong and Errol Williams had less opportunity to show off their acting ability, but both were good in their comparatively minor roles.

Unfortunately, the set design was, I thought, uninspired. The heavy black flats (last used in a production of George F. Walker's *Zastrozzi*, incidentally) were distracting - they were out of place in a play set in modern-day Jamaica and would probably be used more effectively in a play set in, oh, I dunno, maybe medieval Germany (!) Granted, the three levels of *Charades* make it a difficult play to stage, but I got the impression that the set was designed at the last minute.

All in all though, Enterprise Theatre did a wonderful job. Those of you who didn't get a chance to attend one of the four performances of *Charades* missed out on an entertaining and thought-provoking evening.



The Red 'N' Black Revue "Alive and Kicking"

Red N'Black next week

The Red 'N' Black Revue is celebrating its 44th year. One of the finest traditions of UNB, many hours of hard work and preparation have gone into this year's production to make it live up to this tradition. With one of the biggest casts and crew, the show will bring to life song, dance and laughter through the talents of the students.

Naturally, no Red 'N' Black Revue would be complete without skits. Current issues and zany portrayals at its best will definitely tickle the funny bone. As in past years, Red 'N' Black will be show casing many of UNB's most talented musicians (who knows, maybe we will see another Anne Murray cross our stage).

The MC's for this year are Mike Besner and Heidi Hawkins. These two very talented and enthusiastic students are definitely at home on stage. The show will end with a grand finale: the traditional Kickline will be high-stepping across the Playhouse Stage.

It is hoped that this year's production will be a sell out. If you want an evening of fun, come and bring your school spirit. This show is for you. Check out the 44th Red 'N' Black Revue at the playhouse next Thursday, Friday and Saturday night. The show starts at 7:30 p.m. and tickets are available starting this Friday at 1:00 p.m. at the Sub Lobby. Be part of a tradition!