

Catch a Rising Star: Dalhousie Theatre

by Chris Morash

It's happening this fall; Dalhousie's Theatre Department is launching its "First Time Ever" subscription theatre season, offering the public four exciting plays. Recently, I had a chance to talk with Patrick Young, the Artistic Director of Dalhousie Theatre Productions, about this new venture.

Describing himself as a "man with a chequered past," Patrick Young is a man with a youthfulness about him that belies his varied and accomplished past.

After completing a BA in English, he taught in Malaysia, and went on from there to teach drama at an undergrad level, before winding up in the United States for the National Auditions of the University Resident Theatre Association. From this, his "first audition in front of strangers," he emerged as one of the finalists from among several thousand entrants. From that point on, he moved from company to company, taking roles in literally dozens of productions, including what was the longest running Canadian play of the time, *Automatic Pilot*.

Gazette: You mentioned earlier that much of your early professional acting experience in the United States was with

repertory companies attached to university graduate schools—a situation that does not exist in Canada. Is the institution of a subscription series here at Dalhousie working toward developing that sort of thing?

Patrick: It has that in mind, yes.

The whole focus of the Acting Program here at Dalhousie is that when you are in your third year you are the core of a small repertory company, and you are featured in all four productions. Everything about our circumstances here is set up as professionally as possible—we even run our rehearsals on Equity (the actor's union) rules, so that our people can get a feel for professionalism, and what it means...so yes, this is a part of that same thrust.

We are creating seasons here, and we have done so for three years now at Dalhousie Theatre Productions, with four very varied shows that are designed to appeal to the public, and are designed to resemble the seasons of the major theatres in the country in their variety and their appeal. But we had never advertised ourselves in that

way, so that as far as the general public knew, they'd open the paper and discover that we were going to do a show up here next week, but they had no idea that we had a season planned.

Gazette: So what you're doing here isn't really very different from what you were doing last year...

Patrick: Yes, but the way we are presenting it is different, because we want to be identified. We're proud of what we're doing, and we'd like to be able to stand or fall on our own merits.

There's always a little something to overcome, too, in that the image of a university, to the public at large, necessarily means something intellectual, and remote from their everyday lives, and a part of presenting ourselves in this way is to try to counter-act that image, and say, "Listen, we're doing theatre here. Theatre is a popular art." It's designed to be accessible to the public; it has to be.

Gazette: Tell me about Dal Theatre Productions' first show, *Canadian Gothic/American Modern*, which opens Oct. 19...

Patrick: Well, it's an interesting piece, and a well-known piece, by Joanna Glass, who is, perhaps, south of the border, the best known Canadian playwright, because she lives there and her plays are usually produced there first.

Gazette: It's said you can tell when a Canadian is a success—they leave the country.

Patrick: In her case, I guess it's true. This is a pair of plays, a double bill, one of which focuses on something very insightful about Canadian society, the other has something very insightful to say about American society. They're thoughtful plays, jewel-like in construction, small, deftly crafted, with humour, wit and pain. They are not big, splashy productions, but are intimate in their nature.

Gazette: Which, of course, is in sharp contrast to the next show you're doing, Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream*. I've heard that *Dream* is going to have real grass on the Dunn Theatre Stage...

Patrick: Yes, and the fairies are hardly ever going to touch the ground: they're going to be

aloft almost the whole time. It's a very fresh approach to a great play.

Then, we're doing a contemporary, naturalistic comedy, *Split*, which is hilarious, and also very real; about life and relationships now, in the 80s. It's by Michael Weller, a very respected American playwright; when you see one of his plays, you see yourself on the stage—I'm directing that one, and I'm looking forward to it.

We're ending with a big musical; director and final choice of shows yet to be confirmed. We're still talking to Alan Lund, but even if we don't get him, we'll get someone exciting.

Gazette: Who are some of the other people who will be involved with this season?

Patrick: Well, we have Bob Doyle, who is a unique artist, a unique professional, and who has worked for most of the major theatres in the country, and who now works for us. Peter Perina, with his Czech background and European point of view is a very exciting and imaginative designer. He and Ian Pygott, our Technical Director, ensure that the production values here are as high as the best theatres in the country; there are many small regional theatres that can't come up to our level.

Gazette: So would you say that you are offering the public a professional quality theatre?

Patrick: Well, I would certainly say pre-professional; professional production values—professional production and design—and very committed work from pre-professional students, both backstage and on stage. These are all people who are in professional training programs, who are headed for the business, and who want to be in the business for the rest of their lives. The people who the audience see here on stage, or whose names they read on the program backstage, they'll be seeing in the theatres in the future, and reading in the programs in the future. Catch them on the way up!

Gazette: And you're hoping the "First Time Ever" subscription series will make people aware of this?

Patrick: Yes, we're hoping to get a response, and that those who buy will spread the word for next year. Certainly people will be aware of us as a season, as a producing company with professional goals and professional standards. And we'll go right on producing a season for years to come.

Second City coming to Cohn

Second City's immensely popular touring company is coming to Dalhousie for two performances in the REBECCA COHN AUDITORIUM, Friday and Saturday, November 18 and 19 at 8 pm. Both shows will be open to the general public but the good news is that all members of the Dalhousie community will get first crack at the tickets.

Beginning Thursday, October 20 Dal students, staff, faculty and alumni (with ID cards) will have two full days to grab up all the good seats before SCTV tickets go on sale for the general public (Sat., Oct. 22).

The year 1959 marked the birth of Second City in Chicago, Illinois and the beginning of an illustrious comedic tradition in North America. SECOND CITY was opened in Toronto by Canadian theatre entrepreneur, Andrew Alexander, who continues as owner and producer of both SECOND CITY, CANADA and SCTV Network. Alexander's first cast included DAN AYKROYD, JOHN CANDY, JOE FLAHERTY, EUGENE LEVY, ROSEMARY RADCLIFFE and GILDA RADNER.

Most people agree that SECOND CITY's reputation has been won through a combination of entertaining, relevant material and quality performances. The scenes, because they



originate from audience suggestions, are always current, representing satirically the social and political concerns of the day.

The touring company was established in 1976 and has played universities, resorts and conventions throughout Ontario. THE TOURING COMPANY provides an opportunity for young actors to perform vintage

SECOND CITY material and to begin to improvise their own original scenes. In addition, they learn and perfect the improvisational exercises designed to enable them to think on their feet and to create spontaneously.

SECOND CITY graduates have won fame and fortune throughout North America on stage,

screen and television. Many of its graduates have appeared on SATURDAY NIGHT LIVE and all of the stars of SCTV NETWORK, except for Rick Moranis, have been members of the Second City Company in Toronto.

Regular admission for SECOND CITY is \$8/\$7, student and senior citizen admission \$7/\$6.