

# Heavy

BY AVI LAMBERT

Are you really seeing this, or is someone playing with your brain?

The Neptune Theatre's latest offering, John Mighton's *Possible Worlds*, had me questioning if I had control of my own reality — besides giving me an intense urge to go to the bathroom.

The program says the play "will challenge us to ponder questions about our own identity". Damn straight, it did.

The premise of the play is a philosophical argument first proposed by Rene Descartes in the 1600s. Philosophy prof Tom Vinci said it shows up in Descartes' first mediation. Vinci told me it goes as follows: "Can a perfectly systematic and undetectable world be created, so seamless that we can't tell it from reality and our previous 'real' experiences?"

If this 'possible world' can exist, doesn't it cast doubt on how we can be sure we know everything in ordinary perception? There is no evidence we have that favours our ordinary beliefs of sense perception over this sceptical belief. Is the person controlling this world evil?

Vinci said, for the modern mind, the idea would have to be presented via a scientific example to "make it gripping" (as opposed to the medieval notion of a magical entity or "God" controlling our reality). It's a sign of the times to relate this notion to what a scientist can do. Vinci also noted the work of Wilder Penfield, a Montreal neuroscientist who was able to generate sense perception in his patients.

Vinci hadn't even seen the play, and he hit on most of the plot and the name of a main character. *Possible Worlds* does tackle a heavy topic, but it does so with unique wit, delivery, and theatrical trickery.

A murder in the opening scene sets the stage. The play revolves around the search for the murderer, and the plot unfolds. The lines between reality and unreality become blurred as the story progresses.

The character exchanges between scenes, mainly vis-a-vis prop exchange, are momentary starts and stops and glances of recognition which are comical at first, but become a tired joke as the play goes on. Looking back, the momentary acknowledgment between each character in the dark between the scenes somehow fits into the metaphysical framework of the play.

Sound effects also add eeriness. The sound of water rushing, softer first and harder at the end, first made me feel like going to the bathroom, but turned out to be an ironic seal of the main character's fate.

The slapstick police duo, played by Jim Warren and Jamie Williams, make a fine pair. One straight, the other a comedic spazz, are foils to the philosophic pitfalls the main character undergoes. They unite the main plot and keep it separate from the intensely-philosophical subplot.

Randy Hughson as the main character, George, is brilliant. Sometimes ebullient, sometimes poker faced, George plays the tortured man. However, George, in apparently sexual scenes, isn't really sexy.

His wife Joyce (Pamela Sinha) is successfully weird, and portrays all of the different personalities she shifts from well. The characters she plays in the 'unreality' make the portrayal of her 'real' character more understandable.

Michael Simpson as Penfield, the neuroscientist, plays somewhat



PHOTOGRAPHS NEVER LIE, OR ALWAYS DO: it looks like Randy Hughson and Pamela Sinha in John Mighton's *Possible Worlds* at Neptune Theatre until January 24.

of a peripheral character. It suffices enough to say he is a mad scientist.

Rat brains suspended in water, aliens limited linguistically with the words "brick", "block", and

"hilarious", and the comedy of Williams make this play just slightly less comical than it is heavy and dark.

I'm happy to leave this open

Scooby Doo-style so you don't know how it ends. Philosophy students, this should be required credit. For the general public, I'd just say this is great theatre.

## History 101: play brings Africville to centre stage

BY DAISY KIDSTON

Watching George Boyd's *Consecrated Ground*, I couldn't resist picking the play apart like any English major would. I scrutinized the plot, the characters, the setting, the action, the symbolism, *et cetera*.

When the curtain fell I was prepared to dub it a good play lacking some originality. The play seemed too similar to the theme of literary works of the same genre — that of black suppression at the hands of white power. I felt like I wanted something different and was prepared to turn my nose up towards Boyd's efforts to write a play about the destruction of Africville. But my outlook changed when I thought.

Criticizing Boyd's play on grounds that it is *unoriginal* is like watching a movie about the Holocaust and complaining, "the Jewish people were killed *again*?"

I sadly failed to take into account the fact that *Consecrated Ground* is not only a literary work, but also an important history lesson. So Boyd not only had the

responsibility of presenting an entertaining play, but also of doing justice to the history of Africville and its citizens.

After the play I turned to history books and tapes about Africville, such as *Africville: A Spirit That Lives On*, compiled by Charles R. Saunders, (1989), and the NSPIRG cassette *Africville: Not For Sale* (1996). The history in these books helped me realize the excellence of Boyd's play.

Why? Because it told it like it was. Because it faithfully told the tragic story of Africville's demise.

*Consecrated Ground* focuses primarily on Willem (Jeremiah Sparks) and Clarice Lyle (Jackie Richardson), a couple living in Clarice's old family home with their baby son. Their lives change from happy and forward-looking to tragic and sad as first their baby son is killed by the rats that come from the nearby city dump, and then Africville itself is pulled out from underneath them.

The play also introduces us to other intriguing residents of Africville. Residents like the elderly

and wise Aunt Sara, played by Murlita Williams. The tension between Sara and Tom Clancy (Christopher Shore), a city social worker, is palpable. Their tension centers on Aunt Sara's mention of the parallels existing between Africville and the townships in apartheid-driven South Africa.

Clancy is a twenty-four year old white man who's job is to convince the residents of Africville to sign their homes to the city. He too changes through the course of

the play, going from content with his job to horrified at the machine he is a part of.

Boyd not only constructs interesting characters and explores the difficult struggles that come with the expropriation of their homes, he brings to the stage key historical elements of Africville.

For instance, the first thing the audience sees on stage is a sign reading "Please Boil This Water Before Drinking And Cooking". This sign actually existed in

Africville.

Boyd also pays attention to the Africville church, as this was one of the most important aspects of the community. This place of hope and cultural glue was eventually demolished.

Overall, *Consecrated Ground* was a well delivered exploration into some painful Nova Scotian history.

The fact it was such a good local history lesson is one reason I'm glad the night was sold out.

