

## entertainment

## Cruel Tears a country musical

By Michael Christ

I have been one of those people who snicker at country music. I have also publicly aired my distaste for musical theatre. I now ask you to believe me when I tell you that *Cruel Tears*, a country musical, is one of the most enjoyable, thoroughly refreshing, theatrical events in recent memory.

*Cruel Tears* readily demonstrates, that with economy, originality, and unassuming ambition, it is possible to overstep the tawdry greasepaint and garish machinations of the Broadway formula to arrive at a musical theatre which is fresh, vigorous, and unselfconsciously Canadian. Sophistication aside, *Cruel Tears* is simply good fun. When was the last time you said that about a Canadian play?

The play is not complex. Written by Ken Mitchell, music and lyrics by Humphrey and the Dumptrucks, the story takes Shakespeare's plot of a jealous husband who murders his wife and sets it in a Saskatchewan trailer court. The protagonist is not

Othello but a Ukrainian-Canadian truckdriver with an ear for country music. Music is supplied by The Dumptrucks in an easy listening "prairie" style which relies on an all-acoustical line-up augmented with kazoos, washboards, and jugs.

I would like to remark on one rare quality found in this cast: that is, their ability to express enjoyment and communicate it to the audience. Much "stage gaiety" in theatre never seems to get across the footlights, the ability to express simple human enjoyment without causing acute embarrassment in the audience may be one quality which distinguishes the good actor from the mediocre. No doubt almost two years on the road together and country-wide success have given the cast the confidence and familiarity to express themselves in an exemplary manner. *Cruel Tears* is a simple, charming, country musical which demands nothing in the way of critical analysis. All it demands is that you go to the Bathurst Street Theatre and see it. Tell them I sent you.



Truckers casing the barmaid, in "Cruel Tears".

## A member of society is also a victim of it

By Michael Christ

The founding of the modern psychological theatre is often attributed to Luigi Pirandello. In plays like *Six Characters In Search of an Author*, he explored the manner in which beliefs identify the individual as separate from his fellow. Peter Handke in *Kaspar*, currently being presented at the Cafe Soho through the courtesy of Theatre Passe Muraille, continues this tradition and in a reductio ad absurdum takes it one step further: Handke explores the individual not as a product of systems of thought but as a product, if not a victim, of the very words he uses to express his experience.

Handke takes us through the development of an individual, Kaspar, from the time prior to speech formation right up until the time Kaspar becomes a fully articulate member of society. As the playwright sees it, it is a process from integration to disintegration: to be a member of society is to be a victim of that society.

We are victims of society as soon as we begin to express ourselves through speech: as soon as we take our sensory perception of an object and learn to call it "tree" we become divorced from the responsibility of perceiving it fully thereafter, we substitute the word for the experience. As the individual becomes socialized he learns that some words meet with more approval than others, he learns that words have their fashions and he follows them. In the meantime the individual has largely discarded his sensory perception of the world and his own

nature and substitutes a sense of the world defined by corporations, governments, and books of faith: the end product is the schizoid individual, the thinking man separated from the feeling man. Handke expresses this vision with poetic intensity and unsettling lucidity. *Kaspar* is perhaps the most thought provoking theatre piece presently in Toronto.

*Kaspar's* title role demands a tour de force performance from anyone brave enough to attempt it. Jack Wetherall meets all demands and exceeds them in a manner which compels our undivided attention. Wetherall, a six season veteran of Stratford, is one of the most promising young actors in the Festival company; he's played major roles in last season's *Hamlet* and *The Tempest* and this season has played *Orlando* opposite Maggie Smith in *As You Like It*.

While Wetherall demands our attention, director Alex Hausvater seemingly takes pains to divide our attention with his own obtrusive clutter. Handke has written a play describing how the individual can be mired in words, Hausvater has not the wit to realize that visual symbols can be as miring and as victimizing as verbal symbols. Ironically, the director's visual subtleties prevent us from fully experiencing the poet's work. The director's halting use of blackouts and his inane traffic patterns contribute to a uniformly amateur performance on his part. Fortunately, the magnitude of talent possessed by actor and playwright are sufficient to call the production a not immodest success.



By Mary Fraker

RINMON will present an Evening of Sound and Movement November 28 and 29 at 7 p.m. in McLaughlin Hall. They will premiere three new works - including one to music by Keith Jarrett, and will also present a collage of previous choreography.

RINMON is made up of four York graduates - Margaret Atkinson, Melodie Benger, and Sallie Lyons, of the Dance Department, and Murray Geddes of the Music Department - who "compose and perform their own works and teach others to express themselves through sound and movement." Since its beginning in 1974, RINMON has appeared in Ontario and Quebec and at the 1976 and 1977 Dance in Canada conferences in Halifax and Winnipeg.

The performances begin at 7 p.m. and admission is \$1.00 with York I.D., \$2.00 without.



## 'Winter offensive' is more than offensive

By Eric Walberg

For all those who would enjoy watching someone have his ear sliced off and his "wienie" bitten or who are interested in the clitoris and vagina (or more poetically "cavernous cunt") of Frau Adolph Eichmann, for anyone who would get a kick out of a Nazi officer (Karl) kissing Goebbels' warty gangrenous clubfoot, *Winter Offensive* may be worth the effort.

WO is supposed to be a comedy. You can judge for yourselves, some of the "funniest" lines being "He kissed every pubic hair", or one day "shit will taste like chocolate."

In his attempt to reach the heights (or rather dregs) of debauchery without risking having the whole production closed down, the playwright Ken Gass avoided direct genital contact, though he managed to have some kind of frantic humping going on most of the time.

The tedious monologues are wisely combined with the humping and interspersed with such 'comic' relief as the torture of Jewish servants from Dachau, who are stripped, hands tied, and forced to bite each other to death while watching a film of Nazi torture.

And when the humping relents momentarily, S&M imagery takes over. The clubfoot-kissing is a relief for Karl from the "mental flogging" of Speer and Frau Eichmann. We are told of Rommel's prowess as "the World's Greatest Camel Hump".

In spite of all its apparent shock value, however, the play is boring (*Mein Kampf* is a worthy forerunner). The plot is an X-mas party and an assassination attempt on Hitler in 1944 during the Nazis' so-called Winter Offensive, but Gass was not able to get beyond the "ass" or at best the "ass-ass" in his plot (if one can consider the play to have any plot at all).

The playwright Ken Gass founded the Factory Theatre Lab 8 years ago as an experimental corps, aimed at staging avantgarde productions. It has generally been conceded that FTL has been on a downhill course the last few years. WO is a fitting tribute to this decline. It was clearly intended to attract the public eye and to put the Factory "back on the map". WO was to be mounted last year, but it never got off the ground.

Its shock potential (and thus \$ potential) survived that abortive first go, giving it a new lease on life. True, the public eye can be attracted by a flasher or freak show,

but without necessarily putting either "on the map". The only public recognition which this contrived piece is likely to get is the recognition of a new Canadian cultural low. It is a shoddy reminder that a fascination with fascism and decadence is an affront to humanity.

WO is in the spirit of our friend Frau Anita Bryant. They both deal a blow to progressive culture by identifying sexuality and sexual liberation with perversion and degeneracy. In this sense WO is a throwback to Victorian prudery, albeit in a shocking 1960's guise. It is hopelessly out of character in the 1970's.

Each character tries to outdo the others as a cripple - physical and moral. However the result is not a deeper understanding of humanity (or rather inhumanity), but merely boredom.

The play would not even warrant a review except that it has surfaced at a time of renewed interest in overtly political plays (*Eight Men Speak*, Odet's *Awake and Sing*, not to mention Brecht's masterpieces), and at a time when art is being increasingly seen as political.

WO tries (very unsuccessfully) to mix politics and sex. Disregarding the many historical inaccuracies, its political content is "We are all beasts (even the Jews) and-or crazy," while its sex is downright silly.

If you want to see some sex, go to a porn flic. If you want to see some excellent political drama, go to Brecht's *Drums in the Night* for free, Nov. 23-27, at the U.C. Playhouse (978-6307 for reservations). As for WO, on both counts (politics and sex), it is impotent.

## National proves point of old hack

The National Ballet opened its season last week with a performance of *Coppelia* which was often lively, at times inspired, but in the main proved right a long-ago hack who had dubbed the company a "well-bred" one.

A production which has been well-received in the past can sometimes work like clock-work: every step in place, glossed, and yet missing the inspiration that makes it memorable. The opening night performance with all its brightness and charm, took off only a few times and seemed at times to resemble the mechanical doll it is

named after.

One instance of inspired dancing was Erik Bruhn, to whom the current season is dedicated, interpreting Dr. Coppelius. The pain of this eccentric old toy maker upon finding his creation, *Coppelia*, the mechanical doll, motionless in a chair, is almost palpable. He had played God to the doll, infusing it, he thought, with the life-force of young Franz, whom he had drugged for the purpose, in shades of Dr. Frankenstein.

He had transformed it into a mobile, flesh and blood young woman, he thought. But when he

finds out that Franz' fiancée, Swanilda, had dressed up in the doll's clothes and hoaxed him, he cannot bear it. His bride-invention-child in a lifeless heap, he collapses, an exposed, old foolish man.

Other inspired scenes involved Karen Kain, in the role of Swanilda, and Frank Augustyn as Franz, in solos during their nuptial scenes. At one point, during his solo, Frank Augustyn seemed to stop suspended as he twisted in the middle of a leap.

The National Ballet's all too short season will last to the end of the week.

A.K.

CKRY-FM

CKRY is now offering daily weather forecasts, available by calling -3919... the Bearpit show of November 30 from 12 to 2 will feature a program produced with the JSF, including music by Shalomo Carlbach and interviews with Jewish students who have left the USSR.

Upcoming hockey broadcasts with Ian Wasserman include: Friday at 8 pm, U of T at York; Saturday at 3 pm, Queens at York; and Wednesday at 8 pm, York at U of T.