

# entertainment supplement

## Anne Sweeps Halifax

### ANNE OF GREEN GABLES

by Bruce Russell

"Anne" finally made it to Halifax last weekend and judging from the ovation with which Lucy Maude's most famous character was sent backstage opening night, this city was more than glad to see her. This Montgomery classic, Anne of Green Gables, premiered as a musical in 1965 in Confederation Theatre in Charlottetown, not many minutes from, (so the P.E.I. Tourist Office would have us believe), the actual Green Gables house on the north shore. Inevitably, over the ten year life of this production several minor scene changes have been made but, and I'll swear by the Charlottetown performances, no great harm seems to have been done by these.

Generally, however, I felt the singing of the cast was not up to the par achieved in Charlottetown the past few summers and this is probably due to the young age of some of the cast. Eighteen year old Calvin McRae as Gilbert Blythe particularly seemed to have some trouble at various strategic moments, in stretching his lyrics past the first few rows of seats. This is not to detract from the acting, however, which in degree was superior and at times - as so often happens with minor parts, (in this case, of Francois-Regis Klanfer, as Mr. Phillips the Schoolmaster) - close to inspired.

Of the several Marillas that have marched across Anne's stage since 1965, Elizabeth Mawson surely seems to be the most successful in her interpretation of Montgomery's original Marilla "her bark is worse than her bite" Cuthbert. George Merner, however, as Matthew had a harder act to follow as with the Festival. My other

perfectly unjustified bias against Merner was his remarkable aptitude for reminding me, during the first act at least, of Sargent Shultz of Staleg 13 fame. It was so striking, I almost expected to hear an "I know nothing!" line sneaked into one of Marilla's crushingly one-sided exchanges with him. By the end of the second act, however, Matthew had pro-

ceeded to pretty well steal the show, (mainly by his death), and he came in for strong applause after the final curtain. Incidentally Merner was one of the several who could sing - it was a pity Montgomery had him die off.

And this brings us to Anne. Marjorie-Ann, (sans an "e"), Spiller was a good Anne, again having to compete with the formidable ghost of an earlier entity - this one, Gracie Findlay. Nevertheless for my money, M-A gave a solid performance for an opening night, showing a good understanding and execution of her characterization, highlighted by the supporting parts of Maud Whitmore and Mary Trainor as, respectively, self-appointed town crier Mrs. Rachel Lynde and kindred spirit Diana Barry, who giggled in all the right places.

On the whole, the musical was a commendable performance, greatly enhanced by a competent orchestra and orchestration as well as complementary lighting, costuming and scenic effects. The touring of Anne throughout the Atlantic region, will, I hope, set a precedent for other and future Charlottetown Festival hits to be seen in this city. If the popularity of Anne among her audiences here last week is any indicator, Halifax now knows Neptune is not the only theatre company east of Montreal.

