

Here's lookin' at you, Shui Ta

BY LORRAINE PAAVOLA
& DANIEL CLARK

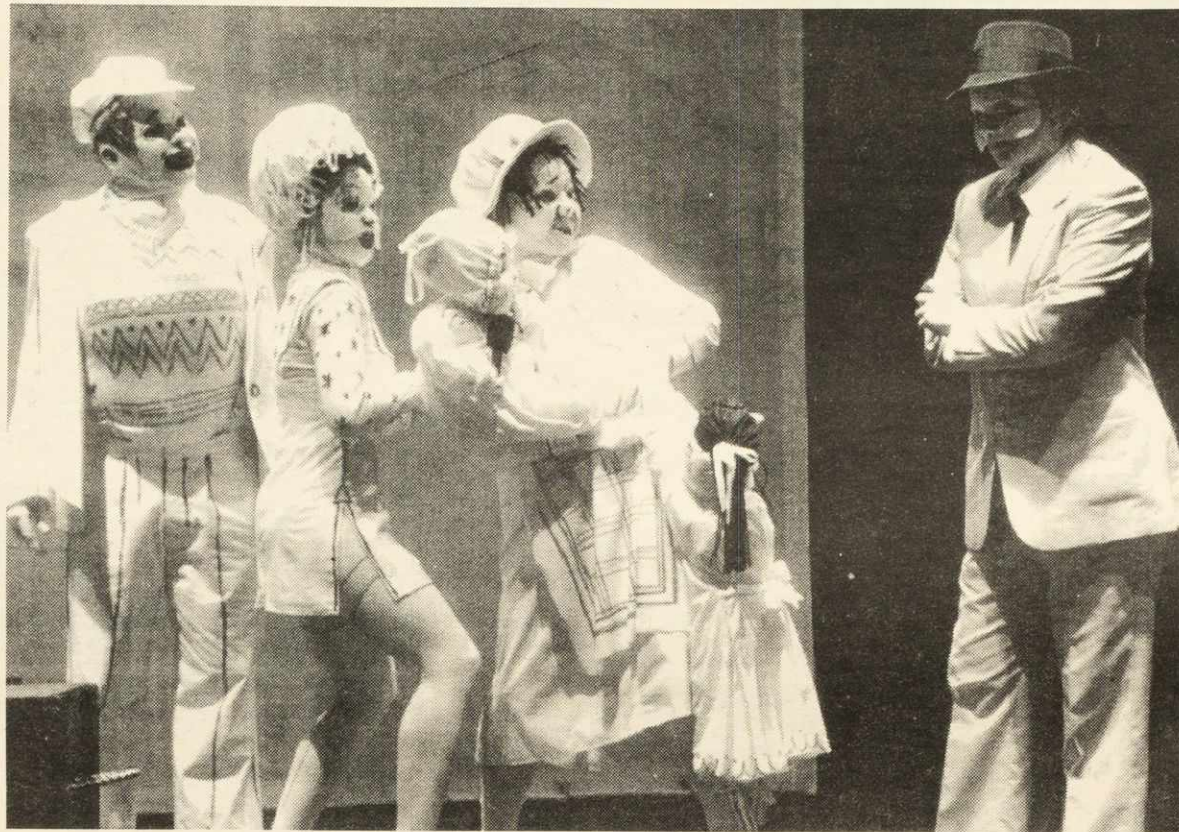
"Man's wishes for goodness are thwarted by a society which depends upon the exploitation of the individual."

This was Bertolt Brecht's philosophy and he makes his point in *The Good Woman of Setzuan*, the third production of Dalhousie Theatre Department's 95/96 season.

Brecht's play opens with the gods setting off on a quest to find goodness in a world that has been stained by greed and insensitivity, and has become obsessed with power and money. There is one woman, a prostitute named Shen Te, whose kindness exceeds her selfishness; she is the only hope for humanity. Rewarding her for her charity, the gods give Shen Te money so that she may change her ways and go about life doing nothing but good — a task which she soon finds is impossible.

After having been repeatedly taken advantage of, Shen Te develops an alternate personality — Shui Ta, a selfish and uncaring "cousin" — to take over business matters and drive off the freeloaders. Kristen Van Ginhoven, who plays the Jeckyl and Hyde character of Shen Te and Mr. Shui Ta, brilliantly captures the duality of the character in a performance that is worthy of the most prestigious of theatres.

The battle between good and evil, naivety and practicality, idealism and realism, justice and injustice, and utopia and true society continues throughout the play, but the conflict is ultimately left unresolved. It ends in a stalemate, and the play closes with a powerful statement about the drastic need



for change — a reflection of Brecht's marxist philosophy.

The power of *The Good Woman of Setzuan*, however, was in the performance by the students of the Dalhousie Theatre Department. The acting by all members of the cast was extremely well done, particularly the clever commentary by Marçel Boulet as the author Brecht. DTDP's production of *The Good Woman...* is done as a show within a show and Boulet plays Brecht as the sarcastic director of a thirties cabaret version of his play. Every so often, he will stop the show, and give a stage direction. The actor then repeats the section of dialogue to hilarious effect.

The Good Woman of Setzuan is

very witty, but it was the way the humour was delivered by this talented group of performers that really make this production work. One can't help but mention the scene where the policeman is playing the doughnut game, and giving advice to Shen Te. It was absolutely silly, but I couldn't help finding it funny. André Davey is to be commended for turning the rather dry character of The Policeman into a Beanian delight.

The three gods played by Sydney Thatcher, Richard Davidson, and Tiffany Jamison-Horne play off each other beautifully, and create very distinct and interesting characters from very little dialogue. Michelle McIntyre, as the wife, not only plays a convincing

character, but also brings uncontrolled hysteria to the audience through the reactions of the baby puppet that she carries around with her throughout the show.

The costumes were by Robert Doyle, and they were absolutely brilliant, especially those of the gods. Some of the outfits were a bit disturbing — the twisted expressions on the masks reminded me of mutant carnival freaks out for revenge — but they were worn by disturbing characters. What can I say...it worked. The fact that these costumes were black and white struck me as clever. They represent the fact that the characters, as human beings, are without depth or substance; they are too obsessed with their own greed. Thematically, this was perfect.

The staging of this production is simple and brilliant. Working with a small budget, director Jure Gantar turns the Art Centre's Studio 1 into a dozen different locales with a complex set of visual effects.

The Good Woman of Setzuan is an excellent play by a wonderful playwright, and the Dalhousie Theatre Department has put on a really great production — one that shouldn't be overlooked. As theatre goer George Bastow said, "These kids give 200%, and work so much harder than the professionals at Neptune."

If you didn't see this production on opening night, go check out one of the remaining shows. And when you do, be sure to keep an eye on the baby.

The Good Woman of Setzuan runs until Saturday at the David MacK. Murray Theatre in the bowels of the Dalhousie Arts Centre.

The performances start nightly at 8 p.m. with a Saturday matinee at 2 p.m. Tickets are available for the low, low price of \$5 for Students and Seniors, and \$14 for everyone else.

Big acts, big benefits

CONCERT

Madhat/Thruster/Rusty

Birdland Cabaret, Friday, February 2

BY AARON DHIR & TIM COVERT

In their first Halifax gig of the new year, Lunenburg natives Madhat started off Friday night's gig with a bang.

Although the band has played tighter shows in the past, their loose set was full of energy and the band members clearly enjoyed themselves. The quartet had a varied set, playing more known tunes such as "Freak" and "Raven" with new material from their new CD *Hardhitters* (ed note: Due to be released March 15 — look for an exclusive review in the *Gazette* in the next few weeks). Madhat ended with a wicked version of Ozzy Osbourne's "Crazy Train."

Halifax pop-rockers Thruster have reformed after some internal troubles earlier in 1995. They are quite obviously back in top form, as they played a polished set of tunes to an appreciative crowd. The twin guitars ground away, backed by an expert rhythm section. The drummer, a bouncer at the Birdland, powered his way through the set while the bassist punctuated the sound with his nimble basslines. The last time I

Rusty exposes local bands

saw Thruster was at a house party in the summer, and the band propelled their energy from the Birdland stage as if they were again playing to a living room full of people.

Finally, Rusty took the stage. They were pretty good on Friday and the mosh pit was hopping song after song. Some people even got surfing, which is a rare event at the Birdland. Notable tunes from their debut album *Fluke* included "Misogyny," "KD Lang," and "Punk." These are tunes which I was listening to all week before the concert and I think seeing them played live was kind of a let down. Consequently, the band didn't really grab hold of my attention though there was nothing technically wrong with their perform-

ance. There just wasn't anything that struck me as amazing.

There was a big crowd at the Birdland on Friday and it seemed a lot more mainstream than previous times I've been to the club. I think this has a lot to do with the mainstream success headliner Rusty has been having. The change in the make-up of the crowd was, at the same time, disorienting and heartening. The more people the Birdland is able to attract the better — the club will survive and more local bands will get the exposure they deserve. To see Thruster and Madhat rock a crowd not exposed to the indie scene is perhaps one of the most encouraging signs I've ever seen of the durability of the music scene in Halifax.

Due to the superhuman fundraising efforts of the CKDU staff, there is no TURGID TEN this week. At press time, the funding drive total was at \$23,000 and climbing. The funding drive continues through the 11th. Keep them pledges coming.

the box

☛ Dalhousie singer/songwriter **Jo Sky** (Joanna Mirsky of Jo and Joe fame) is having a cassette release party for her debut release *Maxillopods In My Pocket* at the Grad House this Friday. The show starts at 9 p.m. and cover is \$2.

☛ The **Dalhousie Art Gallery** continues its series of films for Black History Month on Wed., Feb. 14, with *Long Time Coming*. A 1993 Production of the National Film Board, the Dianne Brand film is a "defiant portrait of two African-Canadian lesbian artists, painter Grace Channer and Africville-born singer Faith Nolan."

☛ The **Alberta Ballet** tippy-toes into the Rebecca Cohn for a performance this Wednesday at 8 p.m. They will be performing Giuseppe Carbone's adaptation of Bizet's *Carmen* as well as works by Canadian choreographers Ali Pourfarrokhi (*Butterfly Dream*) and Crystal Pite (*Quest*). Call 494-3820 for tickets.

☛ Frog Hollow Books is continuing its series of author readings with **Stephen Leacock Award for Humour** winner Bill Richardson. The author of *Bachelor Brothers' Bed and Breakfast* and *Bachelor Brothers' Bed & Breakfast Pillow Book* will be reading from his works tomorrow, Feb. 9, at 7:30 p.m. in the Regency Room of the Lord Nelson Hotel. \$3 for students/seniors, \$5 for everybody else. "A must event to laugh away the February blahs."

☛ The 11th Anniversary of **Frog Hollow Books** will be celebrated this Saturday and Sunday with the chance to win free books, including autographed copies of works by Carol Shields, Amy Tan, Carl Hiassen, and Sue Grafton. All are welcome at the store, 5640 Spring Garden Road.

☛ Wormwoods this week is screening **Unzipped** — billed as the "real Pret-a-Porter" — a documentary from Isaac Mizrahi's former boyfriend Douglas Keeves. *Unzipped* alternates with *The Doom Generation*, Greg Araki's "apocalyptic end-of-the-century mixture of youth culture and visionary excess."

☛ **Salsa Picante** sambas into the Grawood this Friday for a spicy-hot alternative to the usual rock/dance fare. Cleanse your palate with south of the border sounds from Halifax's own latin dance band.

☛ NSCAD's **Anna Leonowens Gallery** will be exhibiting several works over the next week. Heather Wilkinson's *The Tumbler's Dilemma* asks questions about the "relationship between identity and place." It runs until Feb. 10 with Kathleen Bunin's *dark and scared light*, a piece which tries to visually express ideas stemming from literature considered to be Divine. The NSCAD Alumni *Crafts in Atlantic Canada* exhibition will feature the works of NSCAD graduates and their impact on the Atlantic region. This display will run until Feb. 17. The gallery is open Tues. through Fri., 11 a.m. to 5 p.m., and Sat. 12 p.m. to 5 p.m.