

# Neptune theatre comes full circle

BY ANDREW SIMPSON

On Friday night the Neptune theatre began its 35th season in style. With benefactors, politicians and journalists in attendance, the curtains were raised on a new season and a new \$12-million building.

The original Neptune opened in 1963 with George Bernard Shaw's *Major Barbara*. 35 years and over 100 productions later, Neptune is inaugurating its new home with a new production of *Major Barbara*.

Despite being one of Shaw's finest plays, it was the building that drew most of the attention before opening night.

The "New" Neptune is a pleasant sight in one of the dreariest parts of the downtown core. The glass and red-brick exterior and the Art Deco interior replace the old wood building that was as unkempt as it was ugly. Three times bigger than before — stretching between Argyle and Barrington streets — Neptune has expanded all of its facilities, save one. The main-stage auditorium from the original theatre has been preserved and refurbished so that Neptune fans can still enjoy its superior acoustics, sightlines and cosy atmosphere.

Following the reception and speeches, *Major Barbara* and the cast showed they were not about to be outdone by a building.

An engrossing story, with moments of sharp humour, chippy debate, devilishly endearing characters and unsettling moral dilemmas — *Major Barbara* reminded us, amongst other things, that theatres were created for plays, and not the other way around.

The two act play focuses on the reunion between cold-hearted arms dealer Andrew Undershaft (Daryl



Loretta Bailey (centre) plays *Major Barbara* in Shaw's play of the same name. Photo by Kenneth Kam

Shuttleworth) and his Salvationist daughter Barbara (Loretta Bailey).

Undershaft's mantra is money and gunpowder; Barbara is obsessed with saving souls.

When Undershaft sets out to prove the limitations of Barbara's faith, he doesn't guess that setting her free from organized religion will open her mind to a personally tailored religion (a popular theme for Shaw) which unleashes a previously untapped well of inspiration.

Meanwhile, Undershaft is a man of dubious character — selling arms to any buyer — and yet there is something about him that is very attractive.

He manufactures power, because the ability to bear arms and blow up another human is pure power, and he

markets his power to the highest bidder. But Undershaft also has a personal religion which suits his character and frees him from remorse. It is our attraction to Undershaft that forces us to question our own sense of right and wrong.

Other notables include David Renton as Morrison the butler (Renton acted in the original 1963 production as the imbecilic Charles Lomax).

Jordan Pettle is quick and witty as Adolphus Cusins and Nicola Lipman

is hilarious as Lady Britomart.

Perhaps the most interesting surprises were the three fantastic sets created by Set Designer Brian Perchaluk. Neptune apparently spared no expense in making the backdrops for this inaugural production, and the almost choreographed change-overs drew some large ovations from the audience.

*Major Barbara* was an exciting, intelligent production and a great way to kick off a new era of theatre in Halifax.

## Live in Halifax

Bearly's Bar & Grill: Th-Joe Murphy, F-Big City Blues Band, Sa-Big City Blues Band, Su-Blues Jam with Roger Howse; The Bike Shop: Th-10pm The Cabaret, one, no cover, F-9pm Dave Carmichael Band with guests \$5; Birmingham Bar & Grill: T-Paul Mason, F-Paul Mason with Don Gorman and Joe Bonvie, Sa-Paul Mason with Don Gorman and Joe Bonvie, Su-Paul Mason, M-J.P. Ellis to Thursday; Le Bistro Cafe: Th-Linda and Don till Saturday; Blues Corner: Th-P.F. Station, Sa-matinee Paul Ryan's open stage blues jam; Dutch Mason, Su-Reggae HipHop Party, M-3 of a Kind, Tue-open mic night with Dave Carmichael, W-Dj Dance Party with Djs Mark Willitt and Andy Haigh; Bob & Lori's: Th-Tue-Lunchtime with Bill Dawe; Cheers: F-Frank Mackay, Sa-Frank Mackay, Tue-Clam Chowder; Lower Deck: Th-Th-Signal Hill, Sa-matinee with Tony Quinn; Metro Centre: F-Creedence Clearwater Revival; Rebecca Cohn Auditorium: Th-Big Band Swing \$31 reg, \$22 B seats, Th-S-Only Drunks and Children Tell the Truth \$5 opening night, \$15, Tu-John McDermott \$22.50; Seahorse: Tu-the Blue Normans; The Tickle Trunk: Th-Rasta Gumbo, Su-Big Fish, M-Big Fish, Tu-Dale Lechter and his acoustic guitar; Your Father's Moustache: Th-Open Mic. Night, S-Joe Murphy and Blues Street.

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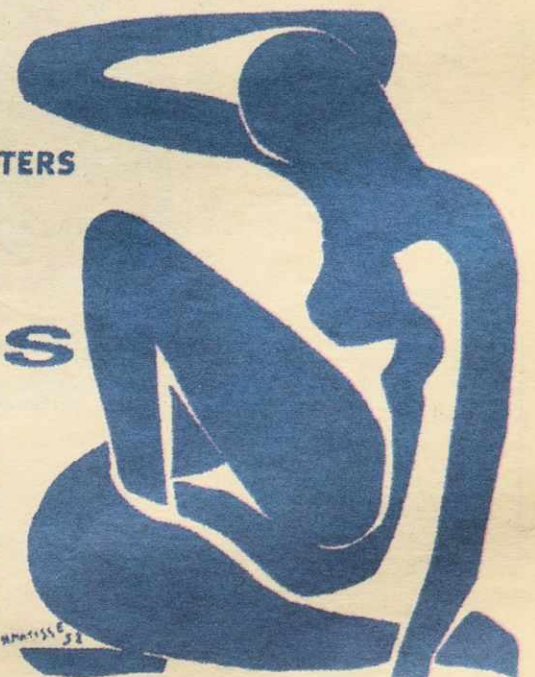
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