

Catalyst looks at delinquency

Theatre review by Shawna Vogel

The Catalyst Theatre Society is a unique group that uses theater for public education and as a "catalyst" for social action. Its actors research and write programs in response to requests from organizations such as the Edmonton Social Planning Council and the Alberta Alcoholism and Drug Abuse Commission. The programs present unanswered problems to the audience. This encourages, between the audience and cast, an open discussion which takes place after each Catalyst play.

On and Off the Street is the Catalyst Theatre's recent production now playing at Theatre 3. It deals with juvenile delinquency and its related causes and problems. This play is not an attempt to make the world look pretty, nor does it present a final solution. It does raise important issues which the public must be aware of and must react to.

The central character is Tom Barnes, played by David Mann. Barnes is the pivotal character; around him the play deals with peer groups, the Law, social workers and the family. It is difficult to avoid stereotypes when portraying teenage gangs, social workers and middle aged parents, but what prevents *On and Off the Street* from becoming an unrealistic soap story is the sincerity of the actors. Although it took five to ten minutes for them to warm up at the beginning of the show, all the actors attempted to portray the characters as real people; not merely cardboard cut outs.

David Mann gives depth to his character of fifteen year old Tom Barnes. Barnes is not a typical teenage hoodlum always causing trouble, nor is he a misguided youth: a victim of his environment. He is a person responsible for his actions but affected by outside pressures.

Many of the actors have multiple roles. Lorraine Behnan plays a juvenile, a social worker and a 7-11 cashier. Her juvenile character Shelley is a teenager living on the streets, making money by prostitution. Shelley is portrayed as a tough, hurt and lost girl. Some of the nicest moments in the play are between Shelley and Tom.

Paul Whitney plays a juvenile, a fellow worker of Tom's father and a judge. Whitney easily handles the age difference between the characters. As the worker, he is one of the potential positive influences on Tom.

Wendell Smith shows great versatility as a pimp, a



photo Jennie Wojcicki

blind man, a rock concert promoter and as Tom's father.

The weakest performance is that given by Sandra Balcovske who plays a juvenile and Tom's mother. Her character as a juvenile is stereotyped, and as the mother, she occasionally has difficulty convincing us she is middle-aged.

The set is simple and functional. It is usually a street scene, but with minor additions of boxes or stools it becomes a concert stage, courtroom and house. The audience had no more difficulty accepting the changes in locale than they did the character changes.

Technically, the show is tight. Scene and costume changes are quick; light and sound cues are on time and well done. What impressed me most is the careful control of the pace and tone. Each moment is carefully structured, whether it be humorous, tense or tender.

An integral part of the show is the punk rock band called Accident. Their songs are carefully chosen to provide a musical link for continuity and to re-inforce the meaning of the particular moments. Their music works! Although the band is always onstage, their presence is not always obvious. They correctly remain in the background when not playing. An entertaining

part of the show is a punk rock concert segment in which the band sings "Monster of Love."

Although I was apprehensive, the after-the-play panel discussion was successful. Members of the audience asked the characters about their motives and solutions. The discussion was highly charged with audience members responding, exuberantly, to the characters and to each other.

On and Off the Street is full of humorous moments but its message is clear. Juvenile delinquency is a problem that has to be solved by increased awareness and thought, and not by laying blame carelessly.

Do it for money

"Do It As You Like It," has been adopted as the slogan for the thirteenth Annual Playwriting Competition sponsored by Alberta Culture. Albertans with playwriting talents are asked to do it and enter their manuscript.

Two new categories in the competition are: One Act Comedies, suitable for community theatre production, and Adolescence, a broad category which would allow the exploration of such areas as adolescent characters, historical perspective or contemporary issues.

The very successful Teleplay category co-sponsored by ACCESS, will be repeated this year. It is designed to meet the need for television script writers. It offers a first prize of \$1,200, with the winning teleplay to be produced and distributed by ACCESS. "Even individuals who did not win prizes in this category last year, found that the notoriety the contemplate focused on their work has made it easier to become involved in other productions," says Gordon Gordey, Drama Consultant with the Performing Arts Branch.

High school teachers are encouraged to continue promoting student participation in the Competition as a means to improve basic writing skills and comprehension. Deadline for entries is February 15, 1980. For applications write: Alberta Culture, Performing Arts Branch, Playwriting Competitions, 11th Floor, CN Tower, 10004-104 Avenue, Edmonton, Alberta, T5J 0K5.

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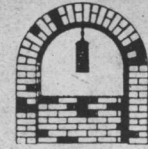
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