



ARTS & CULTURE

Dressing the wounds: four Orphans take the stage

BY DAISY KIDSTON

French-Canadian playwright Michel Marc Bouchard's play *The Orphan Muses*, brought to the stage by Eastern Front Theatre, is a treat for those who enjoy character analysis, the unearthing of painful family pasts and men dressing up in women's clothing.

Set in the Lac St. Jean region of northern Quebec in 1965 during the Quiet Revolution, a conservative Catholic farming community forms the stark setting for the reunion of four siblings.

The four become reunited at the family's farmhouse and this reunion forces them to face the memories of a mother who deserted them 20 years earlier — an action which has clearly warped their lives.

There is Luc, a flamboyantly artistic young man who lives in Montreal and has spent his life being obsessed with the thought of his mother — so much so that he wears the dresses she left behind. Martine, his lesbian sister, is a strong and steady-headed woman who left home to become a captain in the armed forces. Isabelle, the youngest sister, stays at the farmhouse with the oldest sister, Catherine, who acts as Isabelle's guardian.

Although Isabelle is 27 years old, she has the mentality of a child. She is the play's central character and her actions reveal a clever adult lurking behind her apparent simplicity. Catherine is the conformist of the siblings — bitter and constantly anxious about the town's opinions of their family.

Understandably, when these four get together the viewer becomes enmeshed in a psychological web of personalities and personality conflicts, all of which pivot around their abandonment as children. Clearly they have been scarred, and it is both interesting and touching to witness the exploration of their wounds.

My only problem with this otherwise successful production is that I feel the comments Bouchard likely makes about Québécois culture during the "Revolution Tranquille" of the 1960s may easily slip by the audience, particularly those who are unacquainted with the history of Quebec.

The Catholic church is an unseen-yet-central force in this



Eastern Front's singing siblings reunion; Bouchard's *The Orphan Muses* at the Dunn.

play, and significant scenes in the characters' lives occur within a church. Since the "Revolution Tranquille" was a period of political change which sought to reform the traditional and conservative beliefs of both the government and the church, it becomes a very symbolic time period for *The Orphan Muses*. The four characters themselves experience change and they all battle the conservatism of their Catholic town in their own ways.

French culture and the experiences of the characters. However, it is difficult to pay close attention to the setting when you have four richly portrayed characters occupying your attention.

The Orphan Muses, an Eastern Front Theatre production, runs until Oct. 18 at the Sir James Dunn Theatre in the Dalhousie Arts Centre. For tickets call 494-3820.

Literary Horizons

Canadian authors read from their new novels

BY CONAL DONOVAN

Last Wednesday night at the Neptune Theatre, André Alexis and Shyam Selvadurai, two of Canada's brightest new stars in the literary world, read from their latest works, *Childhood* and *Cinnamon Gardens*.

André Alexis' *Childhood* is a story of love, loss, and family. It is a novel about missing one's heart's desire, and about relationships both good and bad. In a soft, deep voice, Alexis read a passage about a man's recollection of his grandmother's death. It was told from a unique perspective — the view of a very young boy who didn't really understand what death was.

After the reading, I asked Mr. Alexis how much of the novel was based on his own childhood experiences. He stopped me mid-sentence.

"None!" he jokingly shouted. He explained the story was entirely

fictional, and described the novel as a "long meditation on death". He says the idea behind his novel is that childhood is merely a stage in life meant for "preparing for the separation from one's parents."

Prize-winning author Shyam Selvadurai's passage from his second novel, *Cinnamon Gardens*, was also associated with the idea of family. His novel, set in 1920s Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), explores a world of pre-arranged marriages, forbidden loves, and complex secrets.

At the beginning of the passage he read, "I see the sea of love, but not the raft on which to cross it." The novel reflects upon a society that doesn't always allow its

individuals to follow their desires.

Although I have seemingly described both of these readings as dark and morose, they were anything but that. It was a wonderful, relaxed atmosphere full of intrigue, and the readings were beautifully done.

Readings by authors take place almost every week here in Halifax.

This fall, Frog Hollow Books plans to have readings from the world famous, best-selling mystery author Anne Perry, as well as award winning authors David Adams Richards and Wayne Johnston. It's a great, and educational, way to spend your free time — without spending a lot of cash.

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TO	MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT	SUN
VANCOUVER	18:45	16:10	18:45	13:55	10:35 ⁶	—	—
EDMONTON	—	16:10	—	—	10:35	—	—
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TORONTO	15:35	14:35	11:45 ⁸	12:40 ⁴ 15:40 ⁶	10:20 ¹¹ 11:30 ⁴ 12:30 ² 23:35 ⁶	10:35 ⁵	—
ST. JOHN'S	—	19:55	—	18:35	—	—	—

*Begins October 12 *Ends October 11 *Ends October 25 *Week of October 5 only **Week of October 26 only

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