

New experimental theatre opens with Creeps

By JULIE BAYLISS

Tarragon Theatre opens this week as an addition to the experimental theatres which are the glory of Toronto. It has a well-converted warehouse for a theatre. Their opening play is a revival of one first produced last season by Factory Lab Theatre, but largely revised by its author in collaboration with William Glassco. It is Glassco's aim, as Artistic Director of Tarragon, to "produce plays of one's own culture and be a part of their inception through the act of collaboration with a playwright." He is particularly keen to provide a workshop and a showplace for new Canadian authors so that their work gains the attention of richer and more established companies.

"Creeps" is about cerebral palsy victims in a sheltered workshop. Superficially it is a repeat of the old "group of characters on a desert island (liner, train...)" formula, with the four main characters representing different attitudes to

their predicament. The play shows a bull-session in the washroom, the only place the "sheltered" workers have any privacy; even there they are harried continuously by the harpy who is presumably the forewoman. By the wit of Freeman's writing and the beautiful performances of Victor Sutton, Frank Moore, Bob Celtic and Steve Whistance Smith, "Creeps" transcends its formula. The characters develop into living individuals and earn our deepest concern. The production is beautifully timed; the big moments are logically led up to without histrionics but with great emotional force. Making ironic points with music-hall interruptions is perhaps hackneyed by now, but most of the time they were pithy and effective in showing the absurdity of well-meaning outsiders (Mr. Freeman is kind about their intentions) who run picnics and clown shows for grown men. A later interruption, a fairground barker shouting the benefits of a well judged quantity of brain damage, is

irrelevant by that stage in the play. We have already identified deeply enough with each character to need no reminder that "there but for the grace of God" etc. The play's central conflict is between the spastic artist who makes his getaway into the outside world, and the potential writer who stays. It is romantic of Mr. Freeman to make his rebel an artist, and also a commentary on ourselves, the outsiders, who might accept a little physical distortion in an artist but not in a carpenter.

Mr. Glassco's production shines with devotion and integrity, in his use of his excellent actors, particularly Victor Sutton as the more-or-less resigned inmate. There are no gimmicks or superficial appeals for sympathy, just a workmanlike, professional production of a play worth doing. One hopes all of Tarragon's writers will be as deserving of Mr. Glassco as is David Freeman, who is working on another play.

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