

Pest-Aside Players

As the budworm turns

by Doug Meggison

The Budworm show has quietly passed through Halifax and will soon be winding up elsewhere. As with many "peoples' productions", the play-musiclet did not receive the attention it deserved.

The absence of promotion hailing the show's advent, or lack of state funding (e.g. from Propcan), do not entirely explain our lack of attachment to local politico-cultural expressions versus Friday night estrangement with the Disco.

Still, in our age of money, culture and Disco Duck, financial backing and appeals to trivial mass conditioned sentiments seem to be the key to recognition.

The Pest-Aside Players failed on this account.

The group has produced above all a political (read heretical?) play which reflects the ongoing "can of worms" surrounding the spruce budworm spray program.

Focus on the locus

Pest-Aside Players are part of the non-unified people's theatre movement which is represented all over the country.

The distinguishing character of people's theatre is two fold. The plays focus attention to contemporary themes. They depict contradictions between lives of residents of an area and the disruptions caused by the changes imposed by outside capital.

Second, the players themselves have a collective approach toward the preparation of the play. Writing may be inspired by one person—as with Pest-Aside's satirist Paul Lauzon—but invariably all participants have their say. Likewise with direction—there is no nervous Attila cueing his puppets, although there may be a nominal director like Pest-Aside's Ken Daigle.

Not a lot of plot

The Budworm Show opens with two well-meaning city hippies (Paul and Jeannie Lauzon) fresh from the Elysian fields coming down to earth on a backwoods New Brunswick's forty acres.

They encourage Joe, the subsistence farmer / part-time logger (Ken Strong) to opt out of the Budworm spray program. Bad for your kiddies the hippies claim.

Well, Joe is confronted with a dilemma. Who's telling the truth, them or them?

He hitch-hikes to company headquarters to gather more information, or at least assurances from the company that spraying is all right.

After some trouble he gets an audience with a company boss.

In a delightful frightening scene, distraught Joe faces a silhouette hidden behind a red curtain. As the boss rapidly rambles a profit loss necessity investment spray maintenance mumbo jumbo tirade at Joe, soothing hands of a secretary are just visible. An articulating shadow cigar completes the allusion.

Joe is still confused and later falls asleep by the wayside on his way home. He dreams of forest spirits. Mother Nature speaks of great balanced cycles interrupted by man.

And low, the Budworm appears.

In a farcical vaudeville dream revue, Major-General Budworm (Jeannie Lauzon) rallies her crack troops for their perpetual suicide assault.

"Some of you will fly boys, and you'll know it's worth it." (Colonel Boogies march is not as rousing as Major General Budworm's call to the Instar brigade.)

Still later in Joe's dream, two moths (Paul and Jeannie Lauzon) dance their mating ritual.

Although the audience is inclined to laugh, chortle as mating positions are assumed, the interpretive ballet is accurate to biology as are Major General Budworm's incitations of assault strategy.

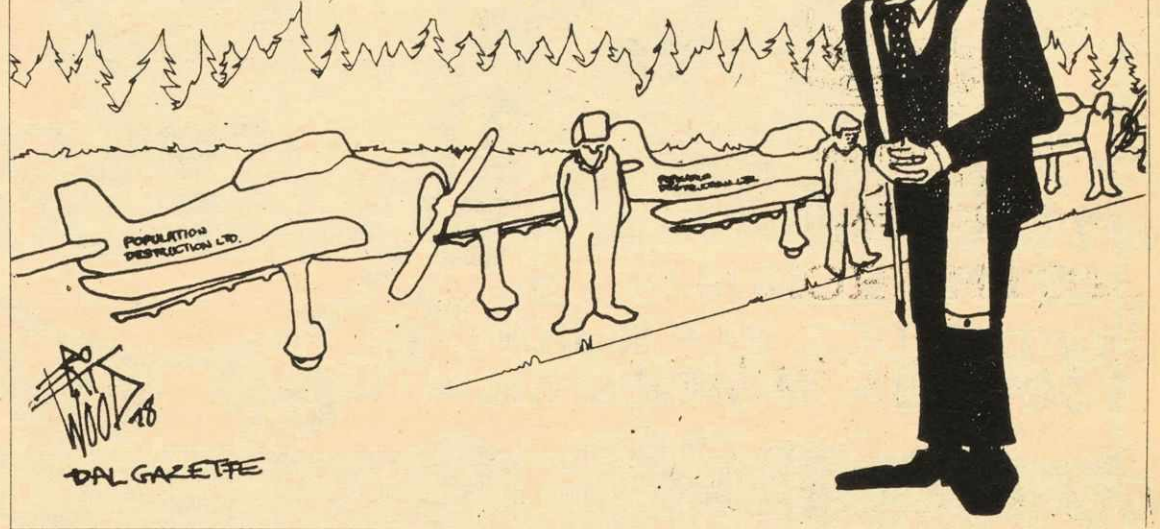
More is more memorably presented in the show about

THE BLESSING

.... AND FORGIVE US FOR TRESPASSING THO WE WILL SPRAY THOSE WHO TRESPASS AGAINST US ...

AND DELIVER US TO IRVING FOR HIS IS THE KINGDOM... THE POWER AND THE MONEY FOR EVER AND EVER ...

AMEN



the budworm life cycle than many a textbook.

Joe eventually wakes—"some dream"—and catches a lift home with a sympathetic truck driver (Ken Strong).

By the end, Joe has not made his decision about whether to opt out of the spraying program. (But he has found out that Forest Protection Limited will spray his woodlot regardless. Even Marker balloons will not keep the mist out.)

Entreaties and entropies

The Budworm Show is strong on biology and delivers up to date goods on the research into links between spray emulsifier and danger to the health.

All is couched in humour, entertaining plot, terrific music and believable stage characters.

The show is especially endearing—or perhaps too much so—as it yanks at our heart strings when Jeannie and Paul Lauzon's children come on stage at the end as a

dramatic assist to Joe's deliberations.

The Show is somewhat weak on the real-life alternatives to spraying or how political action could change things.

It fails to point a finger at the Irving empire or indicate the overlaps and separations between government and corporation.

Of course no one asked them to provide this.

But when we recall the splendid achievement of the Mummerys when they articulately defended Newfound-

land fishermen in 'They Club Seals, Don't They', the Budworm Show comes up lacking.

Nevertheless, budworms are a far different problem than green peacers. Even the Major General would agree.

The Pest-Aside Players will soon be regrouping under a different name. They are provoking a rumour about a Christmas pageant in which the return of J.C. occurs in New Waterford.

Maybe it will be "Buddy". It will be a performance to watch for—This time round for sure Dalhousie!!

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