

UPEI Theatre Society: still breaking legs

By LINDSAY KYTE

You've seen them laughing over coffee in the Pit, scampering frantically about town in search of unusual objects, or, most appropriately, in their element on the stage. They are the UPEI Theatre Society, and they're getting bigger and better all the time.

Professor Ron Irving has been involved with the society for almost twenty years. When asked if, in his experience, there has always been an interest in theatre among UPEI students, he was quick to assure that there has, albeit with "periods more active than others. . . busier times. . . such as the last few years."

Indeed, current members of the society are not only involved with dramatic happenings on campus, but have branched out into the theatrical community, with many involved in organizations such as Theatre PEI, ACT (A Community Theatre), The Edge Players, and also with innovative independent projects.

One improvement made to the society this year was the construction of a new stage in the Alumni gymnasium. Irving describes this addition as a "great asset" which will prove extremely beneficial as compared with a time when "you had to scramble to find places to rehearse."

Richard Haines, co-chair of this year's society, agrees that the stage is a "good start" for what he hopes will be a series of bettering changes in the next few seasons.

Haines was one of two

student directors for last term's one act plays, *Salome* (the other play was *The Birthday Message*, directed by Rebecca Lake). He describes his rather large cast of twelve as "a great pick of people [who were] open to criticism and advice." He also states that the undertaking was "a lot of work" and "very stressful, as all theatre is."

The one acts did not have an actual budget so costumes and props were limited to the "found objects" of a student volunteer. Whatever purchases had to be made were funded by members of the cast. Overall, however, Haines was satisfied with the results of his efforts.

The theatre society provides an opportunity for all students, regardless of past experience, to become involved, as compared with other institutions where dramatic performance is limited strictly to those involved in its study. Consequently, a society's production may be the first performance for some students, occasionally leading to mishaps such as were encountered during the final night of one production last term. But UPEI's theatre society has always enjoyed an esteemed reputation in the past, and hopes to chalk this incident up to "lessons learned for the future."

The future begins with this year's major production, which will be *Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet)* by Atlantic Canadian playwright Ann-Marie MacDonald.

This work is well-known

throughout Canada, and has been performed numerous times recently. Haines will direct this play, and he eagerly anticipates the "great pool for talent" of students who will be auditioning. With a winter's break in outside productions, many students are returning to their dramatic roots in the society for this event.

"We have a number of students seriously interested in theatre, as evidenced in the past history of the theatre society," says Irving. He adds that this has been an essential element in the establishment this year of a new Theatre Minor program, of which he is the current supervisor. It is comprised of various academic drama courses, along with theatre workshop classes, and a practicum, whereby the student is directly involved in some aspect of a production, and assessed upon his or her performance.

The theatre society offers unique challenges, a chance for dramatic experience, and a place where amusement and achievement are equal partners. Students of all faculties are welcome to join, and to therefore become one of the highly caffeinated crew in the Pit.

Auditions for Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet) will take place January 21 and 22, and sign-up sheets for cast and crew positions are posted on the bulletin board outside of the English lounge on the second floor of the Main Building.

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