

Chesterton Charms UPEI

By Pamela Shaw

Last Wednesday and Thursday the faculty and students at UPEI were treated to a two day visit by the talented Tony Van Bridge. His trip centred upon his performance Wednesday night as the early twentieth century author G.K. Chesterton, but also included a seminar, 'Koffee Klatch' and a banquet.

Mr. Van Bridge, a British actor who has worked on and off in Canada since 1954, presented his acclaimed one-man show in the Duffy Amphitheatre at 8:00 Wednesday night to a large and enthusiastic audience. It began with an original flourish when Mr. Van Bridge entered as himself, wearing a tuxedo and an apologetic look, gravely explaining that there was a serious problem, but the "show must go on". A good number of the audience fell for this, actually becoming anxious for the problem to be solved. Then, as Mr. Van Bridge smiled, he showed he had fooled them by saying the problem was the fact that G.K. Chesterton had not yet arrived; he had probably missed his bus or train. But, as Chesterton said, "The only way to catch a train is to miss the one immediately before."

The novelty of the opening continued as Mr. Van Bridge chatted merrily with the audience while taking off his tuxedo, donning wool padding to give more of an idea of Chesterton's large form, then putting on a suit of comparable size. While he used spirit gum to apply a



Photo by Augustine Hi Lou Ping

walrus moustache and a pice-nez, he told an amusing little anecdote about how George Bernard Shaw once prodded Chesterton in his ample stomach and asked, "What are you going to call it?" Chesterton replied, "Well, if it is a girl, Elizabeth. If it is a boy, Gilbert Keith. But if it is only wind, I'll name it George Bernard Shaw." And, after he finished telling the story, he straightened up and the audience saw that Tony Van Bridge was no longer before them, but now G.K. Chesterton was in their company. Enchanted by the transformation, the audience burst into spontaneous applause.

The majority of the first act centered on Chesterton's essays, including "What I Found In My Pocket", a very pleasing piece which discussed the veritable treasure trove one finds

occasionally in one's pocket. Another interesting essay was titled "Twelve Men", a rather tongue-in-check look at how the judicial system has a few quirks to it, considering the fact that they have to get men outside the law in order to have a jury and get things done.

Throughout the various essays presented, Mr. Van Bridge took advantage of Chesterton's observant and amusing remarks or "one-liners" to either fill in the space between essays (into which he led the audience smoothly) or to just throw out something for the audience to laugh at. One such quip came when, in his character's clumsiness, he knocked a paperback book off the table, then picked it up to show it was a typical criminal thriller, the kind with a lurid looking corpse on the back. He showed

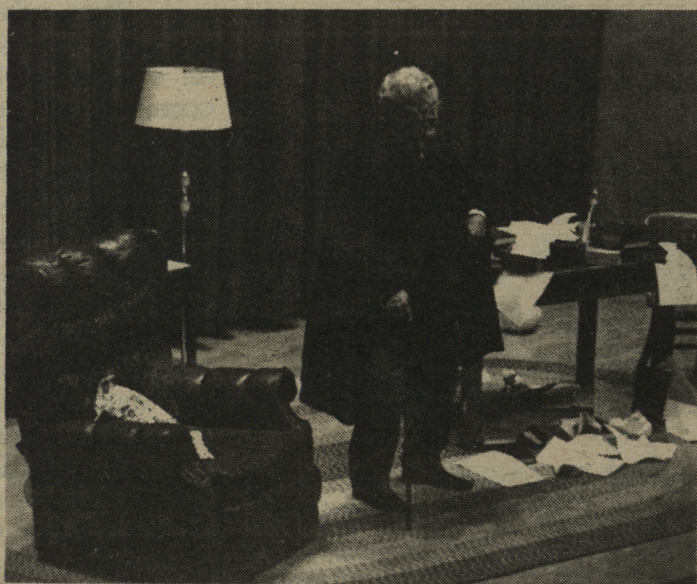
this to the audience, then said it was the usual "whodunit": "On one side there's someone shot, and on the back they tell the plot."

After a brief intermission, Mr. Van Bridge returned to read a story called "The Blue Cross," which was selected from Chesterton's novel The Innocence of Father Brown. It was quite a feat to keep the audience interested for thirty-five minutes, but Mr. Van Bridge did it with apparent ease, although he later commented it was the most physically exhausting segment of the show. The story was a bit confusing, to make a mild understatement, and it was not until the end of the story that everyone understood the plot. This story ended the performance and Mr. Van Bridge was treated to a well earned burst of applause.

The next day Mr. Van Bridge attended a "koffee klatch" to just sit and chat with interested persons, and this turned into another enjoyable session. The topics ranged from G.K. Chesterton to the evolution of Canadian Theatre to radio drama or the "wireless". There was a wide variety of people attending the meeting in the Chaplaincy Centre, and perhaps this was one reason for the highly interesting and diverse discussion. Mr. Van Bridge, is seemed, has the same dry sense of humour as Chesterton, and his colourful wit helped make the casual chat session another enjoyable event.

Finally, at 12:30 p.m. on Thursday, Mr. Van Bridge was the guest of honour at a banquet held by the St. Dunstan's Board of Governors, attended by a collection of professors from the English Department as well as a group of English majors. The dinner was capped by a sort of "off the cuff" speech by Mr. Van Bridge, who entertained the diners with a 20 minute talk laced with more of his engaging wit. Apparently someone had apologized for the rain,

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Photos by Todd MacLaughlan