

Ottawa Citizen. Nov
THEATRE REVIEW 1996

Kanata first-class

The Woman in Black

Kanata Theatre

When: Nov. 20-23 & 27-30; 1996
8 p.m.

Where: Ron Maslin Playhouse,
Walter Baker Park, Kanata

Tickets: \$12; phone: 592-1715

By Iris Winston

Citizen correspondent

Do you believe in ghosts? Do you think a desk and chair can be driven as a horse and trap, or that you would be relieved to see a phantom dog rescued from quicksand?

You just might after seeing Kanata Theatre's first-class production of *The Woman in Black*, which opened Wednesday. Stephen Mallatratt's dramatization of Susan Hill's suspenseful novel moves from a low-key beginning through steady tension to a chilling climax.

An old woman has died. Her lawyer must go to her house on the marshes of East Anglia in England to wind up her affairs. A simple enough assignment, were it not for the evil ghost, a woman in black who haunts the place and brings the threat of death in her wake.

The lawyer (Brett Kelly) seeks to exorcise the terror and its aftermath by replaying his story with an actor (Tom Kobolak). But does retelling the ghost story recreate the evil? Or is such a thought mere superstition?

Director Beverley Brooks, in complete accord with the insidious style of the script, begins the play with one of the two actors at the back of the theatre. The frequent use of the entire auditorium surrounds the audience with the build-up of fear and the sounds of death revisited, drawing you most effectively into the fog and quicksand around the house on the marsh.

Eerie atmosphere

It is no mean feat to create the eerie atmosphere *The Woman in Black* demands, particularly as the early scenes are static and wordy. The actors have an uphill battle as they move from an academic conversation to re-enacting the nightmare.

But Kobolak and Kelly respond with ease to the heavy demands of the script. Kobolak's performance flows seamlessly between his role as the actor and assuming the persona of the lawyer. He is authoritative, both before and after he believes in the power of the ghostly woman. Kelly is also convincing, though occasionally his matter-of-fact, almost deadpan, approach lessens his impact as Kobolak's foil.

Technicians rise to the play's tremendous challenges. Sound by Rob Mitchell and Rob Fairbairn, lighting by a team led by Karl Wagner, set design by Paul Gardner, and spectral effects from Emma Moore and Thalia Breeze all bring the spectre back from the grave with chilling effect.

An "Unofficial Review"

As many of you may know, CBC is cutting down on reviewing plays in the Ottawa area - budget cuts, etc. Charles Haines has always come to our plays and reviewed them - some memorable others not! He still comes to our plays although he is not the official CBC reviewer. He does, however, try to "get on the air" and has even offered to do it for free, but is not able to do this because of Union rules. To quote him, "If you so much as breathe on the air, you have to be paid"!

Charles came to see *"The Woman In Black"*. He called me last weekend to thank me for "a really nice evening out". Here is his "unofficial review" of the play - and perhaps we could put it in the scrapbook.

"Thank you for a really enjoyable evening. I enjoyed the play. It is a good play and very tough to do. They did it very well. There is a tendency in that type of play to have it drag, but the Director moved it along nicely. The technical side - well, that was high quality stuff. Simply amazing. Very well done. The two guys acting in the play did a very nice job indeed. It was a very enjoyable play. I wish I could have said so on the air, but there you go, budget cuts. It really was a very nice evening out. Thank you".

He is coming to see the next play, and we are hoping to have his successor at CBC come out as well. I felt everyone should know the "off the air" review! Well done everyone!

Annmarie Copple.

Arts and Entertainment



Brett Kelly and Tom Kobolak in *The Woman in Black*.

'Scaring' up an audience

Kanata Theatre

Like opera houses, theatres have an innate atmosphere which lends itself to flights of fancy. What self-respecting theatre doesn't have its 'becreepered' story? It is not difficult to imagine when standing alone in a silent, dark auditorium that it is perhaps home to a phantom or spectre. Theatres hold, after all, the echoes of dramatized human emotions.

There are productions which, legend has it, are cursed. "The Scottish Play" is but one. To some, therefore, inviting a ghost story to one's theatre may seem to be

tempting providence, which could explain why there are so few serious, dramatized ghost plays.

Kanata Theatre is taking up the challenge. Its production of the ghost story, *The Woman in Black*, is the first in this region. It is still enjoying a long run at the (haunted) Fortune Theatre in London, England. The play is ambitious, necessitating an unusually wide array of sound and lighting effects to complement the 'goosebump' mood and ambience of the script and actors.

All shows rely on team effort but *The Woman in*

Black blurs the divisions between backstage tasks: set overlaps furnishings, costumes overlap props, actors overlap stagehands. All blend to produce a tight, cooperative, interdependent crew with one enthusiastic aim in mind — to create a few hours of suspended belief so that our audience can enjoy a tale of 'haunting and evil, fear and confusion, horror and tragedy.'

The Woman in Black will be presented at the Ron Maslin Playhouse from Nov. 20-23 and Nov. 27-30. Make sure of your ticket by calling the Kanata Theatre box office at 831-4435 for tickets