

It's a Dickens of a crime

By Joann Newton

The Windmill Theatre Players will present their spring musical, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* beginning March 25. A musical comedy, it is based on a novel by Charles Dickens and set in a Victorian English town shrouded in mist and mystery. Dickens' own words sets the stage:

"A fictitious name must be bestowed upon the old cathedral town. Let it stand in these pages on Cloisterham . . . An ancient city, Cloisterham, and no meet dwelling place for anyone with hankering after the noisy world. A monotonous, silent city, deriving an earthly flavor throughout from its cathedral crypt and so abounding in vestiges of monastic graves that the children grow small salad in the dust of abbots and abbesses and make dirt pies of nuns and friars."

Since Dickens died before completing his novel and untangling the puzzle he devised, we are left with the ultimate "whodunit", one in which the mystery can never be truly resolved.

In the musical version, a troupe of Victorian music hall actors compete for votes from the audience to help decide "whodunit" for that evening's performance.

Many of the characters accused of the murder of Edwin Drood reflect the cloistered quality of the town and the dark side of the lives of those who live there.

Two such characters are the Reverend Crisparkle and the besotted gravedigger Durdles. While on the surface, they represent traditionally opposing ends of the social scale, beneath this veneer, the scales of morality seem oddly reversed.

As Cedric Montcrieffe (the music hall actor who plays Crisparkle) writes: "As I see it, a long-lost love of the Reverend is resurrected in the guise of Rosa Bud. In his confusion, he seeks to claim her as both father and lover, so, when he sees young Drood, with all the arrogance of his youth and social station, caring so little for the poor orphan Rosa, he resolves no one will ever take his love from him again, especially not Edwin Drood."

In contrast to the reverend's ravings the drunken Durdles seems a model of Victorian virtue. Says the actor who portrays him:

"Hello, my name is Nick Cricker. I've been with the Music Hall Royale for the past 20 years. In this production, I play the part of Durdles, a gentleman whose

knowledge of the cathedral tombs is exceeded only by his capacity for wine and spirits. If, indeed, Durdles killed Drood, he probably did it accidentally, while intoxicated . . . Of course, he could be prone to fits of violent rage . . . and who knows what secret makes him seek forgetfulness in the world of spirits — both those he consumes and those he exhumes?"

With such motivations, the solution of the mystery is anyone's guess. *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* opens with dinner theatre performances March 25, 26 and 27. Tickets available by calling Marlene Suitor, 652-7605.

Tickets for the matinee March 28 and regular evening performances April 2 and 3 may be obtained at Pickersgill's Clothing, High River, 652-2252.

REGIONAL, MARCH 1, 1993

The plot thickens for Charles Dickens

By Joann Newton

HIGH RIVER—Had Charles Dickens not died before completing his last novel, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, it might have rivaled the exploits of Sherlock Holmes in its popularity. A tale of disappearance and detection, madness, murder and moral mayhem, the mystery of Edwin Drood's fate can be solved by considering the lives of those around him.

When Drood disappears, clues point to a variety of suspects as his murderer. Motivations abound, including those of love and loyalty. John Jasper, Drood's devoted uncle has a secret passion for Rosa Bud, Drood's betrothed since birth. Rosa reveals that she doesn't want to marry Drood, but also is determined to evade the clutches of Jasper. Her mental state is discussed by Deirdre Penegrine, the character in the musical rendition of *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* who depicts Rosa:

"Although I have played many roles, none is as enchanting as Rosa Bud. Young and innocent at first, she blossoms into a woman strong enough to withstand the advances of the dark and devious John Jasper. Could she have developed enough strength and courage to use murder as a means to end her unhappiness? I think so, and as for name implies, she symbolizes the potential that purity and purpose can have."

But jealousy, love and fear are not the only passions to feed the motivations of murder. A pair of twins from Ceylon, Helena and Neville Landless, reflect some of the passion which such "landless" immigrants may use to fight for acceptance in their new country.

As Helen says: "Since our arrival, I have become more and more protective of Neville and I find I must rely on my fiery spirit

and quick wit to save my twin from the scorn of those like Edwin Drood. The passion of loyalty can move one to do many things . . ."

Neville's own powerful passion is described by Victor Grimstead, the music hall character who portrays him in the play:

"Neville is a hot-blooded foreigner who instantly distrusts and dislikes Edwin Drood. Neville has come to England to escape his dark and turbulent past in Ceylon, but can a change of nation calm his essentially tempestuous nature? . . . Oh, by the way, my fans may not recognize me in my native garb of Ceylon, located somewhere near Greece. Or is it in northeastern Europe? No, it's closer to Japan, oh well, never mind. Anyway, Neville is obviously the most likely character who does Drood in . . ."

Obviously?? Why all these bids for guilty verdicts? Well, as the actors indicate, any one of them could have murdered Drood. Since Dickens didn't finish his novel, no one knows the answer for sure. To resolve the mystery, the identity of the murderer must be chosen, so the actors vie for votes from the audience that will allow one of them to star in the role of Drood's murderer. This results in transforming the play from a dark and dreary drama into a comedy of musical mayhem that should not be missed.

Windmill Theatre Players presents *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* as a dinner theatre production March 25, 26, 27 and April 1. Call Marlene Suitor 652-7605 for ticket information.

Tickets for the Sunday matinee, March 28, and for regular evening performances are available at Pickersgill's Clothing, High River. Phone 652-



ITALIAN OPERETTA — Laura Wall plays the role of Countess Formaggio in *Il Fornicatore (The Adulterer)* during the Windmill Theatre Players' One-Act plays last Saturday in High River. Photo by Maureen Loven.

WTP to host provincial play festival

HIGH RIVER — High River's Windmill Theatre Players has been asked to host the 1994 annual Alberta Provincial One-Act Play Festival to take place March 11 and 12 this coming year.

Each year, entries for the provincial festival are selected from among the winners of Zone One-Act Play festivals held in February across the province. Then the winner of the provincial competition represents the province at the national level. The WTP won the provincial competition in 1990, with its play *Duck Variations*.

In addition, individual members such as George Stone, Hazel Parker and Steve Penman have been singled out with acting awards. WTP has also won all but two of its Zone one-act competitions since they began to participate in 1978.

This year, it is also High River's turn to be host to their Zone's one-act competition. The Zone competitions are open to any individual or group of individuals who wish to enter. The only restriction is that the entire play take place within a single act. These may be either traditional or modern, involve a single player or many and include comedies, musicals or dramas. Many are also written by local playwrights.

In recent years, members from the Bragg Creek, Strathmore and High River theatre groups have participated in the Zone festival, each group submitting as many entries as their members are interested in putting on. Because the Zone's boundaries extend to Vulcan, Drumheller, Airdrie, Okotoks and Banff, however, it is hoped that representatives from many more community theatre groups will participate each year.

Although all the people involved in the productions are amateurs and some are performing on stage for the first time, any examples of high-quality acting, stage production and direction are turned out. Each production is adjudicated by a professional theatrical representative. This adjudicator provides both public and private sessions to give the performers and the audience ideas for improvements.

A considerable amount of preparation needs to go into the festivals to ensure people are accommodated, that enough space is available for sets and costume changes and that stage equipment

and crew are available to help each production run smoothly. This year each of the weekend-long festival events will be held in the Memorial Centre, High River.

Although the Windmill Theatre Players has hosted the Zone one-acts in the past, this is the first year they've been asked to host the provincial competition. The decision to do so has been

prompted, in part, because this year will be Windmill Theatre Player's 20th anniversary. With the musical *The King and I*, scheduled for this fall, a commemorative review of past productions to be staged in the spring, and the one-act play festivals, the Windmill Theatre Players hopes to make its 20th year of entertainment a very "tough act to follow."

REGIONAL, Aug. 30/93



Windmill Theatre Players **AUDITIONS** for *The King and I* Tuesday and Wednesday September 7 & 8

7:00 p.m.
Children aged 6 and up
8:00 p.m.
Adults

Highwood Memorial Centre
Many parts available.
for more information please call
Karen at 260-1111 or 228-6503
or Celia at 652-7913.

The King and I

Windmill Theatre Players are beginning auditions for the *King and I*.

There are several key male and female roles with a number of chorus roles as well. Children also are needed to fill out the cast.

PAGE 5



REGIONAL, Aug. 30/93

REGIONAL, Aug. 2, 1993



Western Wheel

Your community newspaper – first in the foothills • 938-NEWS (6397)

G.S.T. Reg. No. R105259501

Wednesday November 10, 1993 Vol. 18 No. 15 Bag 9, Okotoks, Alberta T0L 1T0

SECTION 1 70¢ PLUS GST



Anna teaches her son how to whistle his fears away in *The King and I*. For story and photos please see Page 9.

Windmill presents: *The King and I*

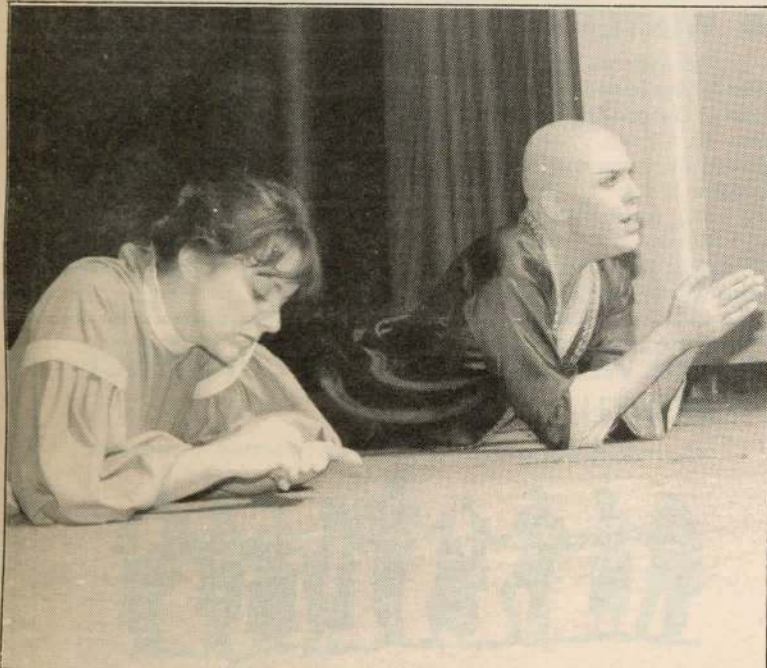
photos by Maureen McNamee



The royal wives take time out from worshipping The King to enjoy a little song and dance.



Teacher Anna Leonowens meets her students.



Anna gives in to The King's demand that her head remain as low as his.

The Windmill Theatre Players started gearing up for this year's production of *The King and I* with their first dress rehearsal Nov. 7.

Aside from a few technical difficulties, the show is well on its way to opening night Nov. 19 at the Highwood Memorial Centre.

The production, directed by Karen King of Calgary, features Ray Fox of High River, The King; Laura Wall, Calgary, Anna Leonowens; Celia Penman, High River, Lady Thiang; Taralee Zimmerman, Okotoks, Tuptim; Delsing Stevenson, Calgary, Lun Tha; Shea Christie, Nanton, Prince Chulalongkorn; Jordan Salamon, Nanton, Louis; Steve Penman, High River, The Kralahome; Gordon Scott, Claresholm, Captain Orton/Sir Edward Ramsey; Brett Rowland, High River, Phra Alack; and Tosha Brown, Nanton, Simon of Legree.



Like their parents, young Prince Chulalongkorn (left) and Louis Leonowens have a difference of opinion.



Secret lovers Tuptim (left) and Lun Tha steal a few moments together.

One more weekend workshop before Theatre Day parade

Theatre Alberta is pleased to announce that the first workshop for the World Theatre Day Parade was a big success. Spearheaded by Windmill Theatre Players, the workshop attracted eager participants from that group and Spitzee school.

Don't worry if you couldn't make the first one, there is still one more workshop where you can design and construct props to carry in the parade.

The final workshop in preparation for the parade happens on Saturday and Sunday, March 5 and 6 from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. in the gym at Spitzee school.

Anyone interested in participating is encouraged to come and join the fun and express what

theatre means to you. Instruction and materials are supplied free.

For the parade which will occur on Saturday, Mar. 12, it is proposed participants gather at 9:30 a.m. at Spitzee school where groups can rehearse a 30-second show stopper for later presentation in the parade. This is where groups could do anything from a short piece of dialogue to a play, a song, dance, mime, clown or improv. The parade will start at 10:30 a.m. and the proposed route is east on Fifth Ave., north on Centre Street to Third Ave., west on Third Ave., returning to Spitzee down Macleod Trail.

Overall parade time will be approximately 20 minutes. Participants of all types are wel-

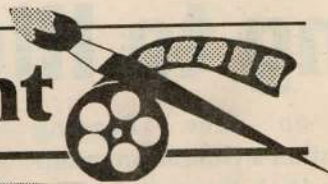
come, from bands to bagpipers, clowns to cheerleaders, dancers to drummers. The parade is held in conjunction with the Provincial One Act Drama Festival, which takes place on Friday and Saturday, Mar. 11 and 12, at the Memorial Centre.

Theatre Alberta acknowledges support from the Alberta Foundation for the Arts, the Department of Community Development and the Lottery Fund, also the Red Deer Town Centre Association.

Theatre Alberta is a non-profit educational society whose mandate is to ensure the growth and health of theatre in Alberta. For information, call Jan Streader at 424-0299.

8 HIGH RIVER TIMES Tuesday, March 8, 1994

Arts & Entertainment



Chandra Storvold, 12, works on a butterfly for Saturday's parade. Photo by Dave Down.

On with the show! Parade Saturday

By Dave Down

Theatre Alberta hosted its second prop-building workshop at Spitzee school over the weekend to help people get ready for its upcoming parade.

The parade goes Saturday, Mar. 12 at 10:30 a.m. from the school and will celebrate World Theatre Day with masks and props built

at the workshops.

Theatre Alberta organizer Jan Streader said anyone is welcome to take part in the parade whether a bard, bagpiper, or clown.

Some expert help showed up to help with prop-building workshop. Peter Field, one of Canada's best parade prop designers was on hand to teach people his tech-

niques for effective prop design.

The group at Spitzee was working on several different designs, like a medusa head, a marmalade cat and many kinds of masks.

Theatre Alberta is a non-profit group with an educational mandate, promoting theatre in Alberta.

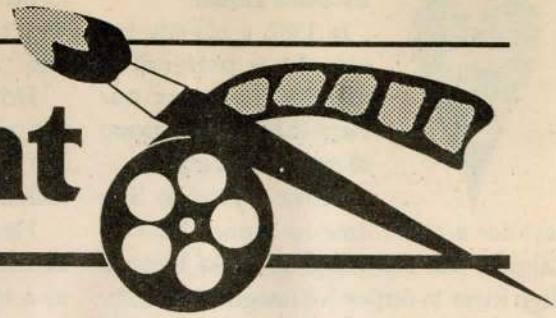
Come out and celebrate Alberta theatre

THIS WEEKEND promises to be a fun one. The best one-act plays from across the province will be performing in town Friday and Saturday with a parade on Saturday morning.

A reminder that the third Saturday afternoon performance may not be to the liking of all audiences due to some nudity, but let's not let it disrupt the celebration of the arts.

H.A. TIMES EDITORIAL - MARCH 8, 1994

Arts & Entertainment



Windmill Theatre Players host *Dessert Storm II* this weekend

Windmill Theatre Players will be performing six One Act Plays on February 11 and 12 at the Highwood Memorial Centre. The event is called *Dessert Storm II* and doors open at 6:30 p.m. with the curtain going up at 7:30 p.m.

There will be three different plays each evening so there is something that should appeal to everyone. Friday's program will consist of three plays by local writers. Karen King of Calgary, a member of Windmill for several years has written *Torch* and its sequel *Torched*.

Torch is a musical comedy set in a run-down bar, circa 1937 Chicago. The plot follows the dreams and aspirations of five characters; a waitress who longs to be a torch singer, a bartender who longs for her, the gangster owner who prefers to let his beautiful but untalented girlfriend do the singing and a wise-cracking piano player who just does what he's told.

Torched, takes place in the same bar two years later. In *Torched* we learn that "reality has a funny way of messing with dreams" and happy endings of the past can become today's heartaches. Both plays feature original music

by Bill Holmes, who conveniently plays the part of the piano player.

Other featured actors in these plays are Laura Wall, Bill Stevenson, Jessica Rowland, and Mark Aitcheson.

The other play on Friday night is *Chekhov's Trout*, written by local writer Larry MacKillop. This is a take-off on Chekhov's, *The Marriage Proposal*. The story centers around a father and daughter who are running their farm with the help of a neighbor. The neighbor proposes a merger of the two farms for efficiency, by suggesting that he marry the daughter. However, he doesn't ask the girl, only her father and when she finds out by accident, things get quite interesting.

Performing in *Chekhov's Trout* are George Stone, Cheryl vanRaalte, Larry MacKillop, Diana Bird and Mark Aitcheson.

Saturday night's line up consists of another Karen King play, a work by Gordon Pengilly of Calgary and the first play of the evening called *Valentines and Killer Chili* by Kent R. Brown.

This is a story about a truck driver who is reminiscing about a waitress he once met. Through talking directly to the audience and reliving conversations with this waitress he describes various incidents including one about a valentine, and killer chili. Gord Scott plays the truck driver with Ro Montgomery as the waitress.

They Don't Call Them Farmers Anymore by Gordon Pengilly is the story of a farm family and their struggle to keep the farm alive. It tells how it is slowly slipping away from generation to generation through no fault of their own. Featured in this play are George Stone, Jim Goodwin, Leah Ritz, Ro Montgomery, Debbie Waddell, Emily Senger and Trevor Wagner.

The final play on Saturday night is *The House Stands Still*. This is a coarse acting play in which the actors have to contend

with such staged mishaps as missing props, an incompetent crew, blown lines and, to top it all, an actor suffering from the flu. Set in the '30s during a hot Saskatchewan summer, *The House Stands Still* is the sequel to *The House Still Stands*, winner of the 1990 regional festival. Performing in this play are Janet Goodwin, Gordon Scott, Cheryl vanRaalte, Greg Smyth, Leah Ritz, Mark Aitcheson and Celia Penman.

There will be lots of desserts to choose from each night with coffee and desserts included in the price of admission. So forget your Battle of the Bulge for the weekend and come out and enjoy live theatre in a relaxed atmosphere. There even will be some musical entertainment between plays by our own USO Troop.

For more information or to order tickets call Marlene at 652-7605.

Windmill Theatre Players

presents

Dessert Storm II

TWO EVENINGS OF ONE ACT PLAYS

February 11th & 12th • 6:30 PM

Highwood Memorial Centre

Tickets: \$8 for 1 night, \$15 for 2 nights

For tickets and info call Marlene at 652-7605.



Windmill Theatre Players

One act festival is set

HIGH RIVER — Over the years, High River has been known to stage some unique and highly successful entertainment. This year will be no exception.

On the weekend of March 11 and 12, the town of High River will act as host for the first time to a series of exceptional dramatic works.

These works will represent the best of a collection of one-act plays that have each won acclaim in the respective regions they represent. Each year local theatre groups, such as High River's Windmill Theatre Players enter one or more plays to compete against plays presented by other local theatre groups in their regions. The winners of these regional competitions come to compete against other regional winners at the annual One-Act Play Festival to be held this year in High River. In turn, the winning entry at this competition is invited to represent the province at the national level.

This year High River's

Windmill Theatre Players will act as hosts to the Provincial One Act Play Festival and are busy preparing for the event. In addition to rehearsing for several plays in readiness for the completion, committees are busy advancing the preparations for the two-day festival.

The Highwood Memorial Centre will house the event where receptions and other related activities will be offered in addition to the series of plays to be presented Friday evening and Saturday afternoon and evening.

Patrons will not only view the plays but have the opportunity to listen to the public adjudications presented for each entry by the competition's judge.

The plays may vary widely as to their nature and range from comedy to drama, monologue production or cast of many, with simple set or an elaborate one that includes a multitude of considerations for the directors and crews. They may be classic pieces or be written by local

playwrights with a unique sense of the familiar.

The only criterion which must be met is that the action takes place within the confines of a single act, and, of course, that they entertain.

Advance ticket sales for single performances or for the entire weekend's activities may be obtained at Pickersgill's Clothing in High River, 652-2252. For additional information regarding the festival call Steve Penman 652-7913.

Arts & Entertainment

Windmill one act previews show promise for Zones

By Paul Hanner

Last Friday and Saturday evening, Windmill Theatre Players used *Dessert Storm II* as a warm-up for this week's Zone VIII One Act Play Festival.

Windmill presented six one-act plays to an appreciative audience of about 250 over the two evenings.

Laughs were front and centre Friday as Windmill's own playwright Karen King reprised her 1992 festival entry *Torch*, a musical comedy set in 1937 Chicago. The action revolves around the dreams and aspirations of five characters in a run-down "gin joint". The ensemble cast includes a stellar performance from Laura Wall as Laine, a waitress who yearns to be a torch singer, and has the voice to succeed if given the opportunity by Mark Aitchison as Frank, the club owner, a tough and loud-mouthed gangster (complete with a shoulder holstered .38 automatic). However, Frank prefers to showcase Nola, his gorgeous, but

fatuous and extremely untalented girlfriend, as the club's entertainment attraction, a character, beautifully interpreted by Jessica Rowland. The interplay between Nola and Frank is reminiscent of Judy Holiday and Broderick Crawford in Garson Kanin's Broadway play *Born Yesterday*.

Completing the cast, Bill Stevenson is Jimmy, the bartender, secretly in love with Laine, and Bill Holmes as Roy, the Hoagy Carmichael-type piano player, whose philosophies help the characters unravel their attitudes toward life, and pursuit of happiness. Some outstanding original music by Bill Holmes, as well as a sparse, but effective set, and Nina Cameron's costumes, capture the seedy atmosphere of writer King's Chicago of the late '30s. *Torch* director Cliff Cameron shows a strong sense of discipline as he guides his players through the pitfalls of life; and has them reveal their innermost thoughts and desires, leaving you caring about the eventual outcome.

Laura Wall shines as Laine and displays an attractive vocal styling on *Sand and Blue* and *Loveless Fate* while Jessica Rowland (Nola) has fun, a la Marilyn Monroe on *Every Woman's Blues*.

Karen King should be pleased with this re-worked production of her 1992 festival entry and can look forward, with cautious optimism, to the Zone Festival this weekend, in High River.

Friday's second one act offering was Larry MacKillop's *Chekhov's Trout*, a send up of Anton Chekhov's Russian work *The Marriage Proposal*. MacKillop has fun with the vagaries of the English language, as he centres his plot around an elderly father and his unmarried daughter (played by MacKillop and Cheryl vanRaalte) who operate a farm with the help of their neighbor Handy Chekhov (George Stone).

The neighbor proposes a merger of the two farms for efficiency, including marrying the daughter. A series of misunderstandings

and comic situations ensue as the play moves quickly to its happy ending, 50 minutes later. Diana Bird, as a Vietnamese live-in housekeeper, rounds out a competent cast with a hilarious scene as she reminisces aloud about her difficulties in comprehending the pidgin English and lack of verbs, as spoken by her employer.

She also supplies the very funny conclusion to *Chekhov's Trout*. Much of this work's success is due to Steve Penman's two-storey multi-scene set, which enables the characters to move from scene to scene without ever leaving the main stage. With the use of slick lighting, director Bill Tupkal has his characters move easily from the farm's kitchen, parlous and upstairs bedroom on the stage's left hand side, to the grain auger and the farm's work area on the right. Stage manager Mireille Rigaux deserves credit for the way she manipulates her cast on and off stage with a minimum of confusion.

Stone and vanRaalte are con-

vincing as the young protagonists and deliver a lot of the play's laughs, but it is left up to Larry MacKillop and his subtle interpretation of the elderly widower with some great throw-away lines, to set up the play's finale, which is left to Diana Bird's Vietnamese character, with hilarious results. *Chekhov's Trout* deserves to do well this weekend at the Zones.

Winding down Friday's trio of plays was Karen King's sequel to *Torch*, *Torched*, set two years later, in 1939 . . . in the same Chicago club, we pick up the lives of Laine and Jimmy, Frank and Nola, and the play's catalyst, Roy the piano player. In *Torched* we quickly learn that "reality has a funny way of messing with dreams" and happy endings of the past can easily develop into today's heartaches.

Waitress Laine (Laura Wall) and bartender Jimmy (Bill Stevenson) who were married at the conclusion of *Torch* have fallen on hard times, and find them-

CONTINUED ON Page 15



Windmill Theatre Players

present the

Alberta Zone 8 Drama Festival

FEBRUARY 18 & 19

Three plays each session

Sessions are Friday at 7:30 p.m., Saturday at
2:00 p.m. and Saturday at 7:30 p.m.

Tickets \$5.00 per session or \$10.00 Festival Pass
AVAILABLE AT THE DOOR

Dessert Storm II treats audience

CONTINUED FROM Page 13
selves back at the club in search of their lost love. Frank and Nola (Mark Aitcheson and Jessica Rowland) continue their abrasive relations, while Roy (coolly played by Bill Holmes) continues to make the club's music as well as manipulate the two relationships to the best advantage of everyone concerned.

As in the original, the cast headed by Laura Wall works well to produce a satisfactory conclusion. Bill Holmes serves up three more original songs; *Love is Forever* (Laura Wall), *Back to the Bottle* (Bill Stevenson) and a show-closing duet *Old Familiar Places*.

The idea of a sequel to *Torch* originated from actress Laura Wall, who echoed the sentiments of the original cast, as to the future of their characters.

Kicking off Saturday evening, *Valentines and Killer Chili* by Kent R. Brown, is a riveting piece of theatre, thanks to an almost flawless performance by Gordon Scott as Jason, a long-distance truck driver, who recounts his lonely life to an audience that is quick to respond.

We learn about his marital breakup, his occasional visits to Big Tom's truck stop cafe and his light-hearted flirtations with Jackie, a brassy waitress who took over running the cafe since husband Big Tom ran off with another woman. *Valentines* is an examination of loneliness and the fear of commitment, as we are allowed to eavesdrop on a burgeoning relationship. Slowly we witness Jackie's hard veneer fall

away to reveal a heart yearning for affection, yet afraid to make that final surrender.

Our final meeting at Valentine's, brings the relationship to an open-ended conclusion when Jackie whispers to a departing Jason, "You can always come home, Jason."

This is Gordon Scott's stage and he accepts the challenge with confidence, warmth and sincerity. His communication with the audience is electrifying; his tears are our tears.

Ro Montgomery's Jackie is an excellent portrayal of two characters — one, hard and brassy, the other a soft, warm and vulnerable person. Director Bill Tupkal plays his two characters with exactly the right amount of pathos. Without Scott's stage presence, *Valentines* would not have worked. Incidentally, the killer chili of the title, refers to the cafe's daily special.

Next up was Gordon Pengilly's *They Don't Call Them Farmers Anymore*, a topical tale of a Canadian farm family and their failing struggle to keep the farm alive. The fast-paced 40-minute play spans three generations as we are witness to the disintegration of a national institution.

Ro Montgomery is our story teller (is she also the angel of death?) and she takes us through the harrowing experiences that befall the family. We are continually reminded of the lyrics from the country song that introduced us to the family: "the farmer has one eye on the banker, the other on the sky". Director Steve Penman became fascinated with

this play when he first saw it produced at last year's Zone Festival in Red Deer, and vowed to make it a winner this time around. He just might do that, as he has imbued *Farmers* with a sense of hopelessness and yet leaves us with faith in the future of the Canadian farmer (maybe not in the form as we now know it!).

Penman's cast is near perfect as he takes us through some 60 years and three generations. George Stone and Leah Ritz handle the elders with the right amount of maturity and dignity. As the grown up son, Jim Goodwin displays strength and enthusiasm, then gradual dismay — as does Debbie Waddell, as the long-suffering wife. The small kids of each generation are played with the necessary innocence and naivete by Trevor Wagner and Emily Senger. This is not a fun play (but them who said life was fun?).

Following the harrowing theme of *Farmers*, it was left to Karen King's *The House Stands Still* to wind down Saturday evening's trio of one act plays.

The audience was in the mood for slapstick comedy, and that's what it got as Celia Penman set the stage for this example of "coarse acting". For the uninitiated, a "coarse actor" believes that if he just keeps going despite the disasters that occur around him, the audience will never notice and everything will work out all right. Such was not the case, as King's plot developed around the age-old melodrama of the wicked landlord who arrives to claim the home of the lovely widow and her small baby: the bumbling in-laws and the local minister (who is performing despite a bad case of the flu necessitating frequent off-stage dashes to be sick!). This, together with flubbed lines, missed cues and falling scenery produced a steady barrage of laughs, as director Ruth Aitcheson's cast played every pratfall to the full.

It's difficult to single out individual acting kudos, as all were convincingly good (or bad!) however you saw it. Janet Goodman, Cheryl vanRaalte, Gordon Scott, Mark Aitcheson, Greg Smyth and Leah Ritz had fun, taking full advantage of the situations presented them in Karen King's sequel to *The House Still Stands*, her first writing effort in coarse theatre. It will be in competition with Windmill's five other entries, two from Strathmore and one from Bragg Creek. The Zone finals are scheduled for Friday and Saturday evening as well as Saturday afternoon.

In addition to a preview of Windmill's six festival entries, *Dessert Storm II* offered its audience a selection of scrumptious desserts while Celia Penman, Gae and Delsing Stevenson, accompanied by pianist Shannon Simington, presented a medley of old-time favorites during the two intermissions each evening.



Frank, played by Mark Aitcheson, asks Roy, Bill Holmes, to take a new position in *Torch*. Photo by Dave Down.

REGIONAL FEB. 21, 1994

Theatre knowledge tested

By Joann Newton

HIGH RIVER — Looking back over many years of tradition one can appreciate the impact which a simple beginning can have on individual lives and on the life of a community.

The Windmill Theatre Players began a theatrical tradition in High River 20 years ago when they staged *The Matchmaker* in the spring of 1974. Since then, many musicals and plays such as *Hello Dolly* and *The Odd Couple* have been put on by the group.

In keeping with tradition, the Windmill Theatre Players will mount a spring play, this year entitled *It's Murder in the Wings*. In addition, to help celebrate the culmination of a 20-year tradition of local theatre in High River, the Windmill Theatre Players have the honor to host the annual Provincial One-Act Play Festival. On March 11 and 12, High River's Highwood Memorial Centre will house the works of actors, directors and stage crews from all over the province.

With three sessions scheduled for Friday evening, Saturday afternoon and evening, the winning plays from regional festivals across Alberta will be presented for adjudication and a winner will be selected to represent the province nationally.

The general public is invited

to attend this event and view the plays, the adjudications, the receptions and the dramatic giant puppet parade that are scheduled.

To this end, the Windmill Theatre Players offer a chance to potential audience members to test their theatrical knowledge with the following questions:

1. What is a commonly used phrase to wish good luck in theatre (3 words)?
2. A play usually has at least how many acts?
3. Viewed from the audience, "stage left" is on which (the left or right) side of the stage?
4. Two famous British and American playwrights were William — and — Williams.

5. What anniversary does Windmill Theatre Players celebrate in 1994?

Answers should be mailed to Windmill Theatre Players, Box 5232, High River, T1V 1M4 prior to March 4, 1994. From all correct responses received a draw will be made March 6 and the chosen individual will receive two complimentary passes to the full weekend of events. (Not available to Windmill Theatre Players members).

Tickets for full weekend passes including social events are otherwise available at Pickersgill's Clothing, High River, 652-2252. Tickets for individual sessions are available at the door.