

# Thursday Matinee

DAVID SWICK EDITOR

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## GET YOUR TOKEN'S WORTH

### Dartmouth becomes Canada's Ocean Playground with shows by Gyllian Raby and others

By MARILYN SMULDERS  
The Daily News

**G**YLLIAN RABY FEELS like a salmon making a perilous journey upstream. "I'm struggling to define what theatre has to contribute when there is media saturation," says Raby. "Is there a role for theatre when everything is recorded — if it isn't recorded, it isn't real?"

Music To Wreck Autos By, a new play Raby has written and directed, debuts just hours from now at Dartmouth's first On The Waterfront theatre festival.

"Theatre is important. You can e-mail all you like, but there is no substitute for me sitting across the table talking to you — or actors relating in front of an audience."

Anyone who wants to feel that kind of passion can get a theatre fix at On the Waterfront, a festival of eight new works by some of Atlantic Canada's best-known theatre artists. On the Waterfront takes place today through Sunday at three downtown Dartmouth venues: the Regional Library and the pedway atrium in Alderney Gate, and the Dartmouth Heritage Museum on Wyse Road.

Raby, 35, has been crazy about the power of words ever since she was a girl growing up in Wales — "one of those kids who read Shakespeare before anyone taught it to me."

#### Headed east

After immigrating to Canada in 1979 — chasing a romantic notion of an expansive, untamed country — Raby settled in Alberta to be close to the Rocky Mountains. There she founded One Yellow Rabbit, a theatre company based out of the Calgary Centre for the Performing Arts, before moving to Edmonton, where she served as artistic director of Northern Lights Theatre from 1988 to 1992.

Two years ago, Raby, her husband Nigel Scott — the set designer for On the Waterfront — and their two children Xavier and Nelly-Zoe picked up stakes and headed east. Scott is studying at the Technical University of Nova Scotia or his M.A. in Architecture.

Raby says a change of scenery is just what

she needed. Since the move she's been teaching playwriting and dramaturgy in the theatre department at Dalhousie University.

Theatre is one of her passions; jazz is the other. Raby marries the two in Music To Wreck Autos By.

The idea for the play germinated last summer when Raby found herself acting as tour guide and interpreter for three Swiss musicians, in Halifax for the jazz festival.

#### 'Big jazz fans'

"One of the musicians was clinically blind. I don't know how, but we managed to climb the rocks down to the beach at Chebucto Head. Then we had this amazing conversation about rhythm. It was very memorable — just listening to the tide and the rhythm of the water.

"That kind of segued with conversations I was having at the time with a bunch of philosophy profs — they're all big jazz fans."

Jazz was born early in this century, as a liberating, black American response to constrained musical forms. Today, musicians are split on whether jazz is as free as it once was.

"Apparently the question at the root of controversy about jazz is: is it trite formula or is it still a genuine gesture of rebellion? Has jazz been co-opted by selling jeans and Pepsi-Cola? Or can it still be said to be a living force?"

"My attitude is: who really cares? Just shut up and listen to it. Nevertheless, I found the arguments very enticing."

Those arguments find their way into the play. Music To Wreck Autos By has three roles for jazz musicians: a saxophonist, a percussionist and a live foley, someone making sound effects offstage. Raby stresses it is "full of music but not a musical."

"I really like jazz which is free composition music, where players are improvising together. When I listen to that, what I experience is lines of dialogue and the way an idea is advanced.

"That's what I love. While communicating, you may do it through word play, memory association or just what you would expect to come next, as in a linear story. But there are so many ways of advancing a story — as jazz shows . . .

"On a day-to-day basis, we experience life in such a linear way that we need to stop time, to open up other horizons. Theatre can do that."



TONY CALDWELL

Gyllian Raby's Music To Wreck Autos By debuts today.