

Dark Days of Censorship – “The Political Playwright”

The George Ryga Story

Bravo! March 2nd, 2005 - 8pm EST, 5pm PST.

“It was blatant censorship, about as blatant as it gets. I think the only thing missing was honesty”- Renee Paris, Ryga’s Agent.

Vancouver – (February 8, 2005) It was considered Canada’s little era of “Macarthyism”. George Ryga, whose best-known work was the play, *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe*, was effectively blacklisted from the Canadian theatre scene after writing *Captives of the Faceless Drummer* in 1970. That play closely mirrored the recent events of the FLQ crisis in Quebec, and was considered by many to be too politically hot to stage. The Vancouver Playhouse, which had commissioned the production, pulled the play before it was performed.

Ryga had written the Vancouver theatre’s biggest hit, and *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe* had been chosen to open the National Arts Centre in 1969, but after the *Captives* controversy, Ryga couldn’t get another play produced for 15 years. The documentary includes interviews with Ryga’s collaborators and contemporaries, including director **Daryl Duke** (*The Thornbirds*), playwright **John Gray** (*Billy Bishop Goes to War*), musician **Bill Henderson** (*Chilliwack*) and **Joy Coghill**, who was the Artistic Director of the Vancouver Playhouse during Ryga’s heyday.

Ryga, who died of stomach cancer in 1987, grew up near Athabasca, Alberta, the son of Ukrainian immigrants. He spent most of his professional life in Summerland, BC, writing plays, poetry and scripts for radio and television, often for CBC.

The documentary was produced by Victoria’s Pan Productions and Harbinger Films and directed by Harbinger’s Michael Maitland. Funding agencies include Telefilm Canada, BC Film, CanWest Western Independent Producers Fund and the Canadian Television Fund. The program will also air on Knowledge Network in British Columbia, Canadian Learning Television in Alberta and the Saskatchewan Communications Network in Saskatchewan and Manitoba.

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