

THE PROVINCE  
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## **WHEN THE OLD IS AS GOOD AS NEW**

**Bob Allen**

It's a curious thing to attend a play that you are sure is terribly dated and contrived and find that, in a peculiar way, it not only still works but, in fact, is quite powerful. Jack Gelber's *The Connection* premiered way back in pre-freak 1959 and dealt with dope in a way that has not been duplicated yet, despite all the pills dropped, hypodermics inserted and smoke inhaled throughout the stoned 60s.

Of course, there are detractors who will quite correctly point out that the play's automatic assumption that junk and jazz go together like a horse and carriage is not fair to either the genre of music or its musicians. While Gelber has written a script that features a bunch of jazz freaks gathered together to wait for "the connection" to arrive with "the stuff," there is much more going on.

Some of that came across Monday night as Oil Can Harry's opened its production of *The Connection* directed by John Stark. In some ways, the play's whole thesis and quite a lot of the dialogue is almost laughably quaint and cliché. Gelber's playing around with audience participation is often clumsy and contrived, but despite those problems there is a quality that works.

Quite simply, there is something about a scene featuring a group of people sitting around waiting for the enlightenment to literally arrive that comments powerfully on a common human condition. Nothing makes sense in life. If there is hope, it must be out there somewhere.

This Oil Can Harry's production features some good performances. Leslie Rainey displays excellent presence and fine control as Cow Boy, the "connection." Howard Fair, Ernie King, Charles Gray and Colin Vint are quite credible as the men waiting for their man while Bill Reiter provides nice comic relief as Jim Dunn, producer of the play within the play that comprises the plot. Wyckham Porteous and Anne Cameron round out the case while Al Wiertz (drums), Jerry Inman (piano) and Billy Taylor (bass) provide effective music. *The Connection* is a puzzling piece in many ways, but it does prove interesting.