

THE PROVINCE
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THEATRE WITH A LITTLE ROCK 'N' SOUL

Bob Allen

In recent months, everyone has been made aware of the serious shortage of theatre performance space in Vancouver. One result is that theatre is being staged in some most unlikely locations. Hotels are starting dinner theatres and buildings waiting for the demolition hammers are serving as temporary theatres in the meantime.

Now, night clubs are getting into the act. Oil Can Harry's has been one of the major fixtures on this city's club scene, and, as of Monday night, it can add theatre to its "entertainment complex" letterhead.

Monday night, under John Stark's direction, Oil Can Harry's will open its production of Jack Gelber's *The Connection*. In many ways, Oil Can's is a fitting place to stage this work. At the instigation of Al Shimokura, the last several months has seen a strong effort to build Oil Can's into a major home for jazz. *The Connection* fits right into that direction.

A lot of labels have been attached to it – "jazz drama," "hip musical" – and, like most labels, they are less than accurate in their generalizations. But the rhythms of the play are definitely in the jazz idiom and it must be considered as a unique piece of theatre.

It was premiered in 1959 by New York's Living Theatre and, despite a slow start, ran there for two years before being adapted to film and embarking on a European tour. It was perhaps the first drama to explore with any success the world of Charlie Parker, who influenced and dominated 1950's jazz. It also attempted to deal with the psychological factors that lie at the root of heroin addiction.

In structure, the attempt is to approximate the jazz improvisational style in dialogue that plays around the central situation of a group of jazz musicians gathered together for a session. Of course, "the connection" – the junk man – is what really has brought them together and the musicians, like Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* tramps, are waiting for their enlightenment [cont'd].

Cast of Leslie Rainey along with Bill Reiter, Ernie King, Howard Fair, Charles Gray, Colin Vint, Wyckham Porteous and Anne Cameron. Music by Billy Taylor, Jerry Inman, and Mike Boyle.