

## Rekert's re-entry into theatre powerful

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# Rekert's re-entry into theatre powerful

BY MARIANNE ACKERMAN

**MONTREAL** — With his broad smile, easy swagger and unfancy, slightly drawling tongue, Winston Rekert was a natural logger. But five years in the northern B.C. woods convinced him quite firmly that "there must be an easier way to make a living." So he became an actor.

"My father was a logger, my mother, a schoolteacher. She put me in a play at 12, when theatre was on a par with crocheting — not exactly macho," Rekert recalls, grinning.

These days, the Vancouver-born actor is busy with lead roles as a drug dealer and professional killer, tough, very macho types to make even the class bully squirm. With a handful of feature films behind him, a Genie nomination for best actor in Don Shebib's *Heartaches*, and a plum stage role in *The Collected Works Of Billy The Kid*, the teacher's boy is doing all right in his second career.

Film yet to be released are *The Colombian Connection*, in which he stars opposite Britt Ekland; *Love*, written for him by **Joni Mitchell**; and *Your Ticket Is No Longer Valid*, with Jeanne Moreau.

"It's been hectic," says Rekert, as he flops exhausted into a front-row seat at Montreal's Saidye Bronfman Theatre, still wearing his spurs and sheriff's badge from the matinee performance of *Billy The Kid*. In less than three weeks he's had to brush up



Winston Rekert: macho types.

on his banjo and singing, forget most of what film directors have been telling him, and absorb the grotesque lyricism of Michael Ondaatje's complex script.

After several years in film, he was worried about his return to the theatre. "I spent a long time getting over the feeling of being big and stacy in front of the cameras. Now I hope I can come back to theatre without getting into bad habits."

He needn't have worried. As the steely, "academic murderer" Pat

Garrett, sent to hunt down the legendary Billy the Kid, Rekert displays finely-honed reserve and understatement, a brilliant contrast to his target. Garrett is presented by Ondaatje as the (relatively) silent, festering type, a man who spent two years by himself in a hotel room learning to drink, and who suspects flowers of silent treachery. Garrett's reputation precedes him by several powerful descriptions from other characters. Rekert's entrance, a grey Stetson shading his eyes, fulfills the reports with icy reality. As his one-time friend and perfect match, Wayne Best's Billy is quick-footed and witty, a joker whose cruel smile belies madness just below the surface.

*The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*, by poet Michael Ondaatje, is an explosive concoction of metaphor and fisticuffs, more epic poem than wild western, though the blood and bullets flow like saloon whisky. Director Bryan Richmond has found many fine dramatic moments in the script. The poetry, which won Ondaatje a Governor-General's Award, is intact in all its wit, beauty and terrifying imagery. But the story, as told by a cast of seven, isn't simply illustrated by acting. The drama and poetry seem to flow as one intense experience. The result is seamlessly stageworthy.

Ondaatje's Billy is a reckless madman, yet a poet whose very survival pends upon his heightened senses. In the disgusting but fascinating

"sun speech," Billy is tied to a chair and tortured by his own hallucination of Garrett's hand entering his sun-rotted brain. Wayne Best writhes in pain until he is left wrung out on the floor, tortured by words as real as any desert monster.

The production is energetic and expertly timed, from repartee to shoot-out scenes. In the midst of all this action, Michael Taylor's music sometimes gets short shift. While carrying his substantial mistress Angela (Diana Fajrajs), her legs wrapped around his neck, Billy is not in the best position to belt out a ballad. The singing voices are weak next to Ondaatje's powerful language.

As in any play where the whole runs smoothly, small moments are memorable. Kate Trotter as a nervous young reporter interviewing the convicted Billy manages to sum up a spectrum of public opinion: she is terrified, fascinated and outraged by the boy killer in captivity. The cast, also including Ronald Lea, Robert Parson and Robert Collins, gives an excellent ensemble performance which hides their brief acquaintance well. Their reward? Heartfelt praise from the student audience in attendance, the kind of instant gratification which Winston Rekert vows will always bring him back to theatre.

"You can't beat the closeness of a live audience," says Rekert. "Film, as somebody once said, is like having a baby. You've got to wait nine months to find out if it's ugly."