

theatre

by Gloria Loree

When my call was put through to Susan Cox in Edmonton, she told me she was on a high. She had just come off stage from a matinee performance for high school students of Henrik Ibsen's tragedy *Ghosts*. "We got a standing ovation—for Ibsen!"

Cox was thrilled that today's youth, inundated with "quick-fix" culture, could respond so sensitively to a 19th-century playwright's message about the importance of speaking the truth—despite the risks.

A large part of Cox's excitement was also likely due to the fact that she is back on stage after nearly four years of strictly directing productions in her capacity as the artistic director of the Vancouver Playhouse Theatre Company. "I really had to be persuaded to do this," says Cox of her return to the stage. She said that she has been fighting it for some time and did not want to come back in some "flip comedy," but in a play that had some kind of profound message.

For Cox that play was *Ghosts*. "I come from a long line of strong women who never spoke the truth: a line of strong, silent women. I'm the

first of the generation to speak—at least on stage."

Cox feels a certain affinity for the woman in *Ghosts* who is denied her voice and tries to break free of the restraints placed upon her. "She is forced to live a lie for the sake of society," says Cox. "And I think you have to die or speak the truth. My mother died of cancer of the throat—and I don't want to do that."

The message of this play still has resonance today, says Cox, because while it may not be the church that is keeping people silent, it is the yuppie society of today and the rules of corporate ladder-climbing. The play speaks to the dangers of valuing people for their job title and not for who they really are, says Cox.

Ghosts is about living with fear and being haunted by it. "And I have been a coward in my own life, and my character gets ahead of me in the play: she speaks the truth in her own life."

Because the play is about truth, Cox says only the truth and no manufactured trickery will work in terms of presenting it. "The naked person has to be out there...it is scary,

dangerous theatre—the kind I love."



Susan Cox, artistic director of the Vancouver Playhouse Theatre Company, doesn't know if the beauty of her North Shore home will be enough to keep her in B.C. after she leaves the Playhouse at the end of the 1996-97 season.

While Cox may proclaim cowardice, she is certainly jumping off the edge after this season when she will leave her job at the Playhouse. What will she do? "I really don't know," says Cox. "What I do know is that I will speak the truth—if I do it through acting, directing or through whatever. I'm trying hard to let my instincts drive me."

Cox says she has always been able to get work in the theatre and doesn't want to jump at the first thing that comes her way, just for the sake of having a job. She doesn't even know if the beauty of her North Shore home will keep her living here. "This nature has hit me in such a big way, but I just don't know anymore if I will remain here. I've always been a gypsy." For Cox, home is where the theatre is. ☺

Susan Cox stars as Mrs. Alving in the Playhouse production of Henrik Ibsen's family tragedy *Ghosts*. *Ghosts* runs until November 9. Call 873-3311 for details.

Photo: David Cooper

