

WORKING ACROSS THE COUNTRY

BY DEBORAH QUAILLE
ARTS EDITOR

In a remarkable journey to capture the heartbeat of Canada, David Cruise and Alison Griffiths explored the countryside through the lives of people who work the land.

Cruise and Griffiths are a husband and wife team, seasoned writers with six previous best sellers to their credit.

Readers may recognize titles such as *The Great Adventure*, the epic tale of the newly created Northwest Mounted Police's first mission to bring order into Canada's wild west, or *On South Mountain*, the true story of the Goler clan of Nova Scotia, who horrified the country after it was learned that they had sex with their own children. The two also collaborated on *Net Worth*, the fascinating account of the National Hockey League's fight over pensions for players, for which they also wrote the screenplay for the television movie.

Their newest release, *Working the Land: Journeys into the Heart of Canada*, is a current perspective with personal stories and anecdotes of citizens from across our vast country. The book deals with more than just "traditional" farming of crops and livestock. The writers explore diamond mining in the tundra, fur trapping in the Yukon, potato growing in PEI, berry farms in BC, and horse breeding in Ontario. They provide complete and

detailed descriptions of their subjects' occupations, offering an intimate portrait that spans generations of old families, newcomers and visitors alike.

"Most of our ideas are our own, but the last one was our publisher's idea. Initially we weren't sure if it was quite our

kind of book - it had neither the exposé nor the historical angle, and we didn't want to do a travelogue," Griffiths comments.

"We started with fewer leads than any other book, only having a handful. But I think it's the nature of the land that we just get passed along from one person to another. This time we followed our noses."

Working the Land, which took about 18 months to write, is incredibly detailed, with characters and places that transport the reader to each situation. It's carefully edited, clean copy, ready for an easily digested read. Cruise and Griffiths set the stage at the beginning of each chapter, laying out a lush description of the landscape they are about to explore, and then delve into the inhabitants and their idiosyncrasies. They succeed in capturing the essence of the individuals, which makes quite humorous stories.

In fact, the audience comes to recognize how the authors find themselves captured by our land - in its subtle nuances, blatant obstacles, secrets - and most definitely its pull.

Alison Griffiths and David Cruise live on a small farm just outside Milton, with their two daughters, Quinn and Claudia, two dogs and horses.



ALISON GRIFFITHS AND DAVID CRUISE

WORKING THE LAND
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Quaille
Reviews

Idle Pursuits

LOCAL PERFORMERS SHINE IN "HOME FOR THE HOLIDAYS"

BY DEBORAH QUAILLE
ARTS EDITOR

It's a gem of an evening, chock full of wonderful seasonal entertainment that's sure to please all ages.

Home for the Holidays is a Christmas variety extravaganza on Sunday, December 12, 1999 at the River Run Centre in Guelph. The thrust of the production is to draw upon the talents of the local community to serve the needy. Almost 175 performers and crew are offering their talents free of charge to raise money and food for the Guelph Food Bank.

The idea is the brainchild of Janet Ksenych, a professional performer who lives in Guelph. According to Ksenych, it's possible to raise between \$7,000-10,000 for the food bank with a sold out show.

Chris Willes, a rural Campbellville resident, will be singing *Gesu Bambino* that

evening. His accompanist is Rockwood music teacher Debbie Tilson on the piano.

"It's a challenging, beautiful concert song that complements his voice and range," Tilson remarks. "Chris's voice is at its zenith this year - a clear boy's treble with warm, endearing qualities. He really has a nice roundness to his tones."

Although only 13, Chris has studied with Tilson for 10 years, beginning with preschool music. He attends grade 8 at Brookville Public School and is certainly a multi-talented youth, having studied guitar and saxophone, and sung in numerous Georgetown, Milton and Guelph festivals.

"Chris was Oliver last year in the RCMPPI production of *Oliver*; with Georgetown's

Globe Productions he played Colin in *The Secret Garden* and was in the chorus of *The Music Man*."

Both performers are pleased to be using their talents for the charitable production.

"It's great to contribute in this way to the food bank," Chris says. "It's something I've never done before and River Run is a huge modern facility."

"The acoustics are perfect," Tilson adds, "and really compliment Chris's voice."

Home for the Holidays begins at 7:30 p.m. and the cost is \$18 per ticket. There are 725 seats available for the performance, with all the money going to the food bank. The food bank and performers also hope to accept a large number of non-perishable food donations from patrons in the lobby on the night of the performance.

PONDERING THE ABSOLUTE MYSTERY OF WOMEN

BY DEBORAH QUAILLE
ARTS EDITOR

In the long dark nights of winter, everyone appreciates a little food, friends and frivolity.

That's just what The Arboretum at the University of Guelph delivers, time after time. Nestled deep within the woods, Theatre in the Trees is an enjoyable night out, and consistently offers great entertainment preceded by a fabulous buffet dinner.

The latest production, *Wife Begins at Forty*, is written by Arne Sultan, Earl Barret and Ray Cooney, and set in a living room in Woking, Surrey.

Director John Snowdon has pulled off another evening of hilarity with his sparkling cast. A couple of the faces will be familiar to regular theatregoers from his last production - Judy Walder as Linda Harper and Rick Renaud as Roger Dixon. In the first act, we find Linda Harper, 39-year-old wife of George, is bored with their marriage and wishing for a lot more vitality and passion. George, who has no energy left after working all the time to provide Linda with a comfortable home, cannot see what all the fuss is about. Unfortunately for George, everyone - from his teenage son to virulent next-door neighbour - seems to have far more energy than he does, only emphasizing his "inadequacy." He can't even get sympathy from his dad.

George's absent-minded father Bernard, played by Henry North, is well portrayed, with excellent projection and injections of humour. Leonard is the teenage son of Linda and George, brought to life by the smooth and quite flawless work of Dan Predon. Roger (Rick Renaud) and Betty Dixon (Marion Cummings) are the convivial neighbours whose good-hearted meddling carries the story through, thanks to the characterizations by their actors.

Judy Walder's work as Linda was thoroughly enjoyable, offering bittersweet moments of awareness to the audience for her pain throughout the situation. Jeff Rogers, who played George Harper, is an incredibly gifted artist who drew on his talents to make the audience laugh well beyond the end of the play. His timing and expression throughout were quite remarkable.

Wife Begins at Forty is rollicking fun in the ribald British way, with surprising twists that encourage the audience to consider the intricacies of sexual relationships, and emphasize the need for continued interest and input into a solid marriage.

The next Theatre in the Trees production is *Beyond a Joke*, written by Derek Benfield and directed by John Snowdon. The show will run from February 5 to April 29, 2000. Call early for tickets: 519-824-4120, ext. 4110.

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