

Arts

Previews and reviews of musical theatre, visual arts, plays, book reviews, biographies and people.

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Life & Times: Joey Smallwood

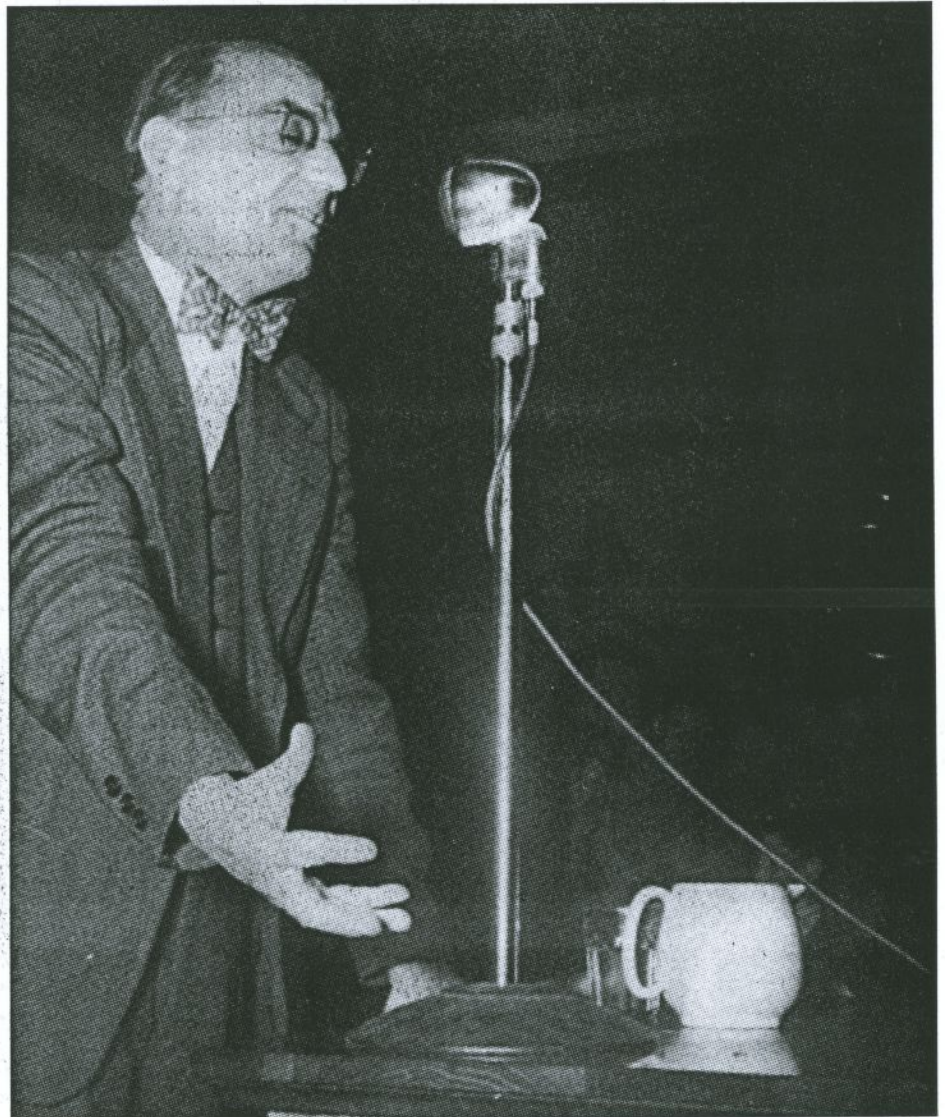
Fifty years on seems a good distance from which to evaluate Confederation. And no person is more closely associated with Confederation than former Premier Joseph R. Smallwood.

Life and Times: Joey Smallwood, is writer and director Barb Doran's even-handed look at the one time journalist, broadcaster, pig farmer and labour organizer who led Newfoundland into union with Canada.

The well-reviewed documentary, narrated by Janis Spence, includes interviews with friends, and former friends, and political associates, and former political associates. Among them authors Richard Gywn, Harold Horwood and Wayne Johnston, former Federal Cabinet Minister John Crosbie and businessman Geoff Stirling. They are all incisive and engaging. Doran bookends these interview segments with a spirited Ship Inn discussion on the pros and cons of Confederation, with the debaters including actor Rick Boland, author Helen Fogwill Porter and historian John Fitzgerald.

The well-handled visual material includes footage of Liberal Leadership Conventions, shots of pre-Confederation outport Newfoundland, and photos of the enigmatic Valdmanis, the Latvian-born financial advisor who, with Smallwood's full support, caused such havoc with Newfoundland economics.

It's fascinating stuff, and still highly relevant. What influenced



'Life and Times: Joey Smallwood' looks at the one-time journalist, broadcaster, pig farmer and labour organizer who led Newfoundland into union with Canada.

Smallwood? How did he manage to accomplish so much? And how, at the same time, did he often manage to behave so foolishly?

A recent *Maclean's* magazine ranked the 100 most prominent Canadians. In a highly insulting

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move, they included just one Newfoundlander – Joey Smallwood. And in a further insulting move, they placed him not under 'Politicians' or 'Nation-builders,' but under 'Characters'. Fits their mainland perceptions of Newfoundlanders in general, perhaps.

Smallwood was not 'a character.' He was a great speaker, a man of amazing energy, a dreamer, he could be called a demagogue, and a Newfoundland patriot. *Life & Times* explores all these aspects of his work and personality.

Horwood calls him charming, with a penchant for hanging out with "people who-ended up in jail" (see Valdmanis, above, also Vardy, also...). Gwyn talks about his energy, his ideals, and his sad political end. Johnston sees a man determined to become part of history, even if it means writing it himself. Crosbie describes a politician he should never have worked with, but grace-

fully refrains from giving back any of the abuse Smallwood heaped on him.

Life & Times is a video well worth having. It's available through Salter Street Productions.

New exhibition

And, at Eastern Edge, a new group exhibition opened on March 31st, the fiftieth anniversary of Confederation. *The Joey Show* includes all manner and medium of artistic tributes to the man himself.

"There are digitally manipulated photographs, installations, pieces made from found material," says Anne Gamberg of Eastern Edge, the day before the opening. Thirteen pieces had arrived and she was expecting a couple more. Other works are composed of watercolour paintings, sculpture and recyclables.

Powerful seat?

"Bonnie Leyton's piece is called

The Seat of Power," Gamberg explains, "and it's a chair constructed by Lawrence Canning, an old fashioned wooden chair. If you're facing it, the front, seat and arms, are carved in a full body portrait of Joey. When you sit in it, you sit in his lap. Around the back she's carved excerpts from his writing."

Recycled piece

Margaret O'Rourke has a recycled piece called *The Flower of Confederation*, and Andrea Cooper has a series of digitally manipulated photographs of Smallwood and Premier Brian Tobin, titled *I Can't Tell the Difference, Can You Tell the Difference?*

Assembled sculpture

Super-Joey is a work by Eammon Rosato, who specializes in assembling sculptures of found materials, like sections of the old Courthouse roof. "It's about three feet high," Gamberg says, "with a Joey in the bow and tie and cape, standing in a suitcase of money.

His head is a block of wood with his face carved on it, and it's hollowed out.

In the hollow are strips of paper, scrolls, that you can take out and read, you can pick his brain. The excerpts written on them are from a book Smallwood wrote in the 1950s, *A Letter From Your Premier*."

Generally, the artists have taken a playful, but respectful approach to the subject.

"I think people are still kind of awed," Gamberg said. "Not so much by the political shadow he cast, but, in reading through the stuff he wrote, he was very confident."

The works, she said, "are not so much about the actual debate or the actual vote." Most of the artists in the show "have adopted Newfoundland, they weren't born here, and the consensus is that Newfoundlanders really had to choose Confederation. They were poor and when this person came along they reached for the life he promised."

The Joey Show continues until the end of April. ▲



The documentary 'Life and Times: Joey Smallwood' is written and directed by Barb Doran.