

# 'John Brown's Body' electrifying

By George Colby

War creates a lot of things. Novels, presidents, population explosions, family fortunes, songs, plays, poems. Like Stephen Vincent Benet's "John Brown's Body," which is currently being presented in rousing and electric style by the Theatre Arts department in Eastern's Fine Arts Theatre.

BENET'S "John Brown's Body" is not a piece of derring-do like "Heartbreak House" because it is an old tried and true show-piece for reader's theatre. The sprawling epic of the Civil War set to Benet's somewhat declamatory and oratorical verse, a sort of Ivy-League (with a dash of

Hollywood) Vachel-Lindsay thing, stamps it as tailor-made for reader's theatre where the sheer word is king.

Jack Rang, the director, is a man of courage, taste, and great talent. His reader's theatre production of "Telemachus Clay" back in 1969, would have been a triumph on any stage,

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## Guest review

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and not many college directors would brave the stage with a reader's theatre version of G.B. Shaw's "Heartbreak House" with college actors, as Rang did last year, and with his typical consummate skill.

IN addition, there is a chorus of 19 voices supporting the verbal action with musical comment, accompaniment, and sound effects. Del Simon and Rang have welded the chorus into something close to perfection, and one only wishes the chorus could have wound up the play with a concert of good old Civil War songs.

The various and exciting drama of carnage and slaughter doesn't move us like it used to. What Yeats called the "uncontrollable mystery on the beastial floor" is maybe beginning to play to a tiring audience. And some are suspecting hints of tarnish appearing on the glory.

But art is true magic. It makes beauty out of beastiality. Go see the play.