

# Arts & Entertainment

## Ubiquitous Yachimec

by Kevin Law

"I can be a bit of a ham," says Larry Yachimec with a boyish grin. In the cozy ambiance of his home atop a hill, and with his two year old son injecting periodic queries of curiosity, Yachimec, a much-praised Edmonton actor who has suffered no lack of work recently, reflects further on his approach to comedy, the theatrical vehicle he enjoys most.

"I like to find a way to present something not necessarily funny as in 'ha-ha, isn't it funny how he did that,' but 'ha-ha, isn't that character funny.' I think people laugh because they see something recognizable in a character, and if I can present something that's recognizable, that elicits a laugh, then I will try for that. I think that's

The audience is an integral part of a play's definition.

part of the job of acting... to present something people recognize."

When contemplating comedy, Yachimec's role in the Workshop West hit *Learning to Live with Personal Growth* comes to mind, and he remembers his lead character with fondness. "*Personal Growth* was a high point," he said, expressing pleasure in a script that allowed the lead character to address the audience directly. "It was really enjoyable, like a re-charge. It was a rush to directly address the audience; one rarely gets to do that unless you're doing children's theatre. It's fantastic when you can look everyone in the eye."

But Yachimec is no stranger to serious drama either. He appeared in the Rice Theatre's successfully volatile production of *Burn This* and he received a Sterling Award last season for his work in *Hurly-Burly* at the Phoenix. He also played in another intense drama for the Phoenix called *Flight of the Earls*, a play about an Irish family and the IRA. Yachimec concedes his character in that drama "didn't have laughs to fall back on... he (the

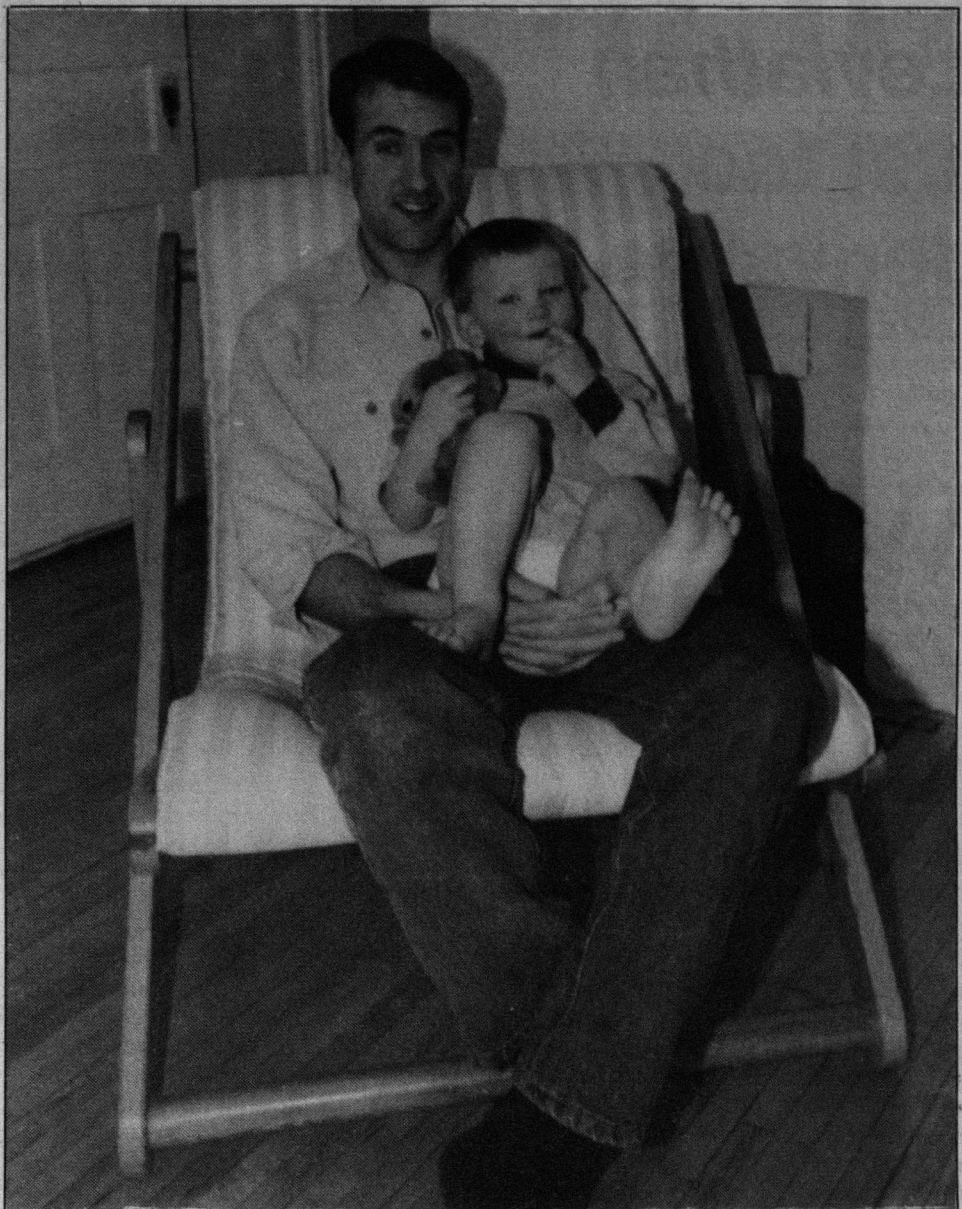
character) was a real bastard, a man without a sense of humor. When trying to bomb relatives, it ceases to be humorous."

Yachimec's latest role is not exactly comedic either. He is set to appear in the Shooter production of *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*, a play about the exploitation of black musicians in the late '20s. It promises to be an explosive look at the effects of racism and lost dreams during the birth of the recording industry. Yachimec calls it "a play about being black and what it is to be black in America." He warns people not to expect a musical. "We're afraid people are expecting a musical like 'Ain't Misbehavin'." Everybody's been hired as an actor, except Sandra (Reaves-Phillips, the lead character of *Ma Rainey*) who has an amazing voice: she sings, and amazingly well."

Larry plays Irvin, *Ma Rainey's* manager who brings her up to Chicago to record her songs. "He brings her up and takes advantage of her in some ways," Yachimec says, but he notes Irwin "thinks he's doing the right thing; he's very sincere and thinks he's helping her."

But Yachimec admits he will not really know who the character is until he's in front of an audience. "The first preview is really important to me because then I can go 'Oh, that's who he is, I get it,' because it isn't really complete without all those people there." For him, the audience is an integral part of a play's definition. The feedback an audience provides is invaluable. "You can rehearse your butt off but you don't really know what the play's about until somebody sees it, somebody who isn't looking at it as a director, or set designer, because they're looking at it in their element, the same way you're looking at your contribution; it doesn't come together until the audience can see it."

Formal education in theatre for Yachimec occurred during a three year stint at the National Theatre School of Canada in Montreal, and although he admits it sounds a bit cliched, he went East "to get away from my parents; Montreal was 3,000 miles away. I didn't even consider auditioning for the U of A because it was in the same city as my parents lived. I needed to rebel and find myself," he said with a



Kevin Law

Larry Yachimec, currently appearing in the Citadel's production of *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*, takes a moment out of his busy schedule to relax with Joe, another aspiring young Hamlet.

smile.

He acknowledges acting school can be real torture because "you're constantly examining yourself, trying to open up old wounds." Gruesome as it may sound, it is currently the fashion of acting to reach for real emotion in performances in order to achieve realistic effect, and Yachimec's experience at theatre school reflects that. He remains uncertain however, as to whether or not the emotional turmoil that is

forced by teachers who are really strangers is imperative. "Sometimes I think I'm not going to know what I learned until I'm 50 or 60 years old."

Such educational doubts must be more philosophic than stifling, judging by the direction of Yachimec's career to date: it hasn't faltered yet, and his role in *Ma Rainey* will likely be another performance worthy of a gold star on the theatrical merit chart.

## Lowe makes Edmonton home

interview by Teresa Pires

John B. Lowe claims to have an affinity for *The Globe and Mail's* cryptic crossword but in his latest role as Richard in Nexus Theatre's production of *The Lover*, he won't have enough time to complete the crossword in between curtain calls. Although he has been cast in quite a few comic character roles recently, Lowe is so excited about playing the lead role that he doesn't mind not sitting backstage long enough to finish the crossword.

"It's been a long time since I've played a character with a major dilemma," explained Lowe. "I like the chance to deal with emotional reality."

Lowe most recently played Ballested in *Lady From the Sea* for Northern Light Theatre and Hector in *Squabbles* by Stage West. Lowe also played Bub Slug in *Bub Slug the Musical* and will be appearing in *Greater Tuna*, later this spring at the Phoenix Downtown.

Yet, *The Lover* is not free of comedy. In fact, Lowe himself is not certain whether or not it is comedy. According to Lowe, well-written drama has funny moments that arise from juxtaposing incompatible images. "There are many funny moments in *The Lover* but it is a comedy *a la* Neil Simon; it undercuts the real drama in the play," said Lowe. "Humour is very important in making the play realistic because we all have a sense of humour in reality."

*The Lover*, written by Harold Pinter,

Lowe's favourite playwright, is humorous because it contrasts the things we say versus the things we do, even though they are often the same thing, explained Lowe.

"It's hard for one character to tell whether or not the other character is playing a game; even when they come to finally dealing with the problem, that is a game too," said Lowe. "It [the play] gets to the root of civilized humanity."

Lowe also performed in another of Pinter's plays, *Betrayal*, which in Lowe's opinion is similar to *The Lover*. Pinter explained that *Betrayal* dealt with people who spoke about things and feelings but who couldn't deal with their feelings. In *The Lover*, the married couple has similar trouble because "although they have a loving relationship, they have been game-playing for so long that they have trouble distinguishing between what is a game and what is reality."

Lowe, an Ontario native, began his career as an actor in *Li-Ho The Happy Fisherman*, an elementary school production which he didn't care to discuss in greater depth. From school, he went on to do some radio broadcasting and eventually moved west in 1982. After studying at the Banff Center and working at Studio 58 in Vancouver, Lowe settled in Edmonton with his wife, Eve.

"I got so excited about the theatre scene in Edmonton it is THE most exciting theatre scene in Canada, even better than Vancouver or Toronto," exclaims Lowe.



Colin Northcott

John B. Lowe, now appearing in Nexus Theatre's *The Lover*, has made Edmonton his home because of the vibrant local theatre scene