



By ZENA McBRIDE

A member of York's faculty was recently granted Ontario's highest honour for teaching excellence. Shelagh Wilkinson, professor of Humanities and director of the Women's Studies program at Atkinson College, is one of 11 professors chosen to receive the award, which is presented annually by the Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations (OCUFA) to acknowledge outstanding ability in the field of education. Anywhere from seven to 12 awards are granted each year, but when one considers that OCUFA represents some 12,000 professors, the achievements of each recipient can be no less than extraordinary.

Such is the case of Wilkinson, who is described by colleague Letty Anderson, Master of Atkinson College, as "truly larger than life. She has the strength of 12 people."

Since she began teaching here in 1969, Wilkinson has contributed a great deal to the academic process at York. She developed five new courses in Humanities, English and Women's Studies, and was responsible for the establishment of the Women's Studies Programme at Atkinson. She is also the founder and editor of the internationally acclaimed *Canadian Women's Studies Journal/les cahiers de la femme* (located in 212 Founders College) and has published several other works which are considered "vital resources for curriculum building in women's studies courses in Canada," according to Anderson.

In 1983, Wilkinson initiated the so-called 'bridging' program, comprised of courses taught off-campus, which are designed to reach out to and encourage students who desire to attend university or college, but are reluctant to do so. The bridging program has lured many new students to Atkinson, especially women, who are attracted to the Women's Studies program offered at the college.

An Atkinson graduate herself, Wilkinson strongly advocates "education until the day you die," and praises the college's emphasis on part-time education. "York started with Atkinson," Wilkinson said. "It was unique in that it was a program specially designed for adults."

Although Women's Studies did not gain official program status until 1980, courses on the subject have been offered since 1972. Each succeeding year new courses were added to the old, building up steadily to a full-fledged discipline in which 36 people are presently enrolled. Wilkinson said that she and her colleagues had little difficulty convincing York's administration of the importance of a Women's Studies programme; they just needed a "full-time person to direct the programme." That person was Wilkinson.

What exactly comprises Women's Studies? "Men's studies modified," described Wilkinson. Such subjects as History, Literature, and the Humanities are studied from a new feminine perspective. "Hundreds of books have been written (by men) about death, but the process of birth has never been examined," said Wilkinson. Furthermore, female authors have long been excluded from course reading lists, but "many women writers from the 15th and 16th centuries are now being uncovered."

Wilkinson is completely dedicated to the elevation of the status of women around the world. "In 1974, I went to Oxford on a doctoral fellowship, doing research on John Locke, and I discovered that nothing had changed there (for women) from the time that Virginia Woolf wrote *A Room of Her Own*," Wilkinson said, explaining that this triggered her decision "to devote the rest of (her) life to women's studies." Wilkinson's travels around the world since then provide some hope that things are indeed finally changing for women.

1985 was declared by the United Nations as the beginning of the decade for women. In July of last year, a convention was held in Nairobi, and Wilkinson was chosen to attend as one of the Canadian delegates. Some 13,000 women from 134 nations were present. "Having it (the convention) in Africa politicized us in a new way," said Wilkinson. "There is an internationalism beginning in feminism." The content of the *Canadian Women's Studies Journal/les cahiers de la femme* attests to this.

"Women in other nations are suppressed,

## Awarding-winning Atkinson professor travels globe to teach women's studies

but they are also organized," Wilkinson stated, "and we need to keep aware of the tremendous exchange of ideas that went on between the countries. There is an emphasis on all of us learning together."

An example of the kind of work prompted by the conference is the research group begun last year at York to sponsor international scholars. Wilkinson cites the fact that three of her students from the SNDT Women's University in Bombay are currently doing their dissertations on Canadian female authors. "If I can take pride in anything I've done, it's that," said Wilkinson.

How does one become an outstanding educator? According to Wilkinson: "Nobody teaches one to teach . . . Basically, you take the best professors you've ever had, and learn from them." The key to effective teaching lies in evoking student response, in "getting them to ask the right questions. You have to lead them in an exploration . . ."

In Wilkinson's opinion, the only way this can be achieved is by impressing "one's own enthusiasm for the subject upon the class." When the teacher is inspired, then the students will be inspired also, Wilkinson feels. But how does one maintain enthusiasm from one class to the next? "You try to do different things," she relates. "When you stand in front of a class for the first time, you have to gauge your audience and know where they are coming from; then you alter the method accordingly . . . If a teacher fails to convey information to the students, it's not the students' fault; it's the teacher's."

Wilkinson was in Greece this summer at a follow-up conference to the one in Nairobi when news of her award was received. She was thrilled to be chosen, but admits that she knew very little about the award before she won it, and had given no previous thought to winning it.

The excellence award was created in 1973, when it was realized by OCUFA that teaching itself was given very little consideration as an important component in a professor's job (the emphasis at that time was mainly on research). Thus, an award was devised to specifically honour those professors who make significant contributions in educational technique and course development. Candidates for the award are nominated by students and/or colleagues, who must support their choice with extensive documentation outlining the nominee's achievements. A committee comprised of both academics and students then reviews each nomination and selects the professors most deserving of recognition to receive the award.

Wilkinson is the 36th professor from York to win the award which makes York the record holder for teaching excellence awards in Ontario universities. Western is the next closest with 25 while the University of Toronto has 15.

## Putz and Bou among highlights of diverse talents displayed at Montreal's annual comedy fest

By MELINDA LITTLE

Andrea Martin is an accomplished actress, but falls short as a stand-up comedian. As hostess of the English language offering at the International Comedy Festival in Montreal (July 10-19) she not only succeeded in 'outshining' the worst performers but also the garishly bright lights that were used for the taping of the festival's television counterpart *Just for Laughs*.

The festival organizers brought in comics from all over the globe (including Spain, China and Australia) to perform in the French (first week) and English (last week) portions of the festival, housed in four local clubs.

The biggest of these was the Theatre Saint-Denis where on July 17 twelve comedians were gathered in an attempt to split sides with their routines. For the most part it was successful. The performers used a wide variety of comedic styles, from European clown to stand-up comedy.

One of the most unusual and more sophisticated comedians was Pep Bou, a Spanish performer whose entire act consisted of play with soap bubbles. His routine was the closest to pure clown. It was simple, silent, and very tender. At the successful finish of a difficult trick he would look up at the audience with an expression of surprised pleasure, which seemed



SHELAGH WILKINSON: Atkinson professor of humanities and director of Women's Studies programme was recently honoured with an OCUFA teaching award, which recognizes outstanding ability in the education field.



magical. Imagine a 3,000 seat theatre lit only by six, brightly coloured cigarette smoke filled bubbles which Bou carefully blended by literally picking them up in his hands and physically mixing them, creating new colours and shapes without the bubbles bursting.

In contrast to Bou's style was Toronto prop comedian Marty Putz, whose assault on the audience was hilarious. Armed with a belt of ammunition, he picked on people not only in the front row, but in the balcony as well, a group of people that no other performer addressed directly. Putz has the amazing ability to appear completely vulnerable yet at the same time completely in control. Within seconds, he united the entire audience until by the end of his act everyone responded to his request for cat noises.

True stand-up comedy, the kind where the only thing separating the performer from an audience hungry for gut-wrenching laughter is a microphone, was well represented, but only in quantity. Steve Mittleman was introduced as the best looking man since Tom Selleck and responded, "I don't have fantasies. I am a male fantasy." Yet he quickly slipped into predictable, self-effacing sex jokes. Helen Lederer, one of the three English acts, should have been left at home. Her routine consisted of barely audible

nervous high-pitched mumblings about boy-friends and sex.

Hale and Pace, again from England, were featured twice in the show. As *The Two Rons* (before intermission), they dressed as thugs in tuxedos, threatening the audience. Few laughed, for there was little energy and nothing new in their routine. After intermission they re-told the classic tale of Cinderella, substituting a flipper for a slipper. Yet their timing was so good that it seemed mechanical.

An appreciated gust of fresh material was American stand-up comedian Marsha Warfield. Her relaxed matter-of-fact delivery was evidence of a confident performer who actually had some fun. She posed some unusual questions to the audience, such as, "Why do dead people get to ride in such nice cars?"

The last act of the evening was Louie Anderson, an American comic whose description of "mom" was so oddly precise it was comfortingly funny. Mom to dad quietly driving car: "Oh, look, dear, that's where Shirley's daughter works." But no one knows who Shirley is.

The evening was graced with the presence of Jerry Lewis who wasted about 10 minutes of valuable time promoting his next film and mugging it up for the television cameras.