

# arts

## hot flashes

### music

Hovel notes...tonight's jazz presentation is the Bill Jamieson trio featuring Jamieson—alto sax, Bob Tildesly—trumpet and John Grey—bass. Music starts 9:30 p.m.  
Sat. Feb. 26 at 2:30 p.m. Big Miller and his big band will begin another series of Saturday jazz concerts at the Edmonton Art Gallery.  
Victor Borge performs with Pierre Hetu and the ESO Feb. 23 and 24. Tickets at the ESO box office 11712-87 Ave., phone 433-2020.  
Jesse Winchester will appear tonight at SUB Theatre. Two shows 7:30 and 9:30 p.m. Tickets \$5 in advance at Mike's and the HUB box office. \$6 at the door.

### dance

Bonnie Giese and Mary Moncrieff perform March 3 to 5, in the Rice Theatre at the Citadel. Tickets \$4 for adults and \$3 for students. Performances begin at 8 p.m.  
The Ukrainian Shumka Dancers will perform at the Jubilee Auditorium March 3 and 4. Tickets available now at Mike's.

### art

The Edmonton Art Gallery's current show—a photography exhibition by Sidney Phillips and a watercolor exhibition by Murray W. MacDonald, ends Mon. Feb. 28. *Aspects of Realism* opens Thurs. March 3 at the Gallery. The show is the current major art exhibit being circulated by Rothman's and features works by an international cross-section of artists. Phil Darrah, an Edmonton artist and instructor at the U of A has a one-man showing of paintings opening March 1 at the Gallery. The Students' Union Art Gallery will feature an exhibition of works done by current graduate students of art and design here at the U of A. The exhibit opens Wed. Feb. 23.

### theatre

Northern Light Theatre's *Brecht on Brecht* opens March 3 at the Edmonton Art Gallery. The collage of Bertolt Brecht's finest prose, poetry, songs and playwriting will be performed Tues. and Wed. at 12:10 p.m., Thurs. and Fri. at 12:10 p.m. and 1:10 p.m. and on Sat. evenings at 7:30 and 9 p.m.  
The Northern Light Theatre joins the Citadel in presenting *Brecht* at the Citadel March 11 at 12:10 p.m. Admission \$1.  
The Citadel presents the opening of *Schweyk in the Second World War* by Bertolt Brecht on Sat. Feb. 26. The play runs until March 19. Tickets for both Brecht productions at the Citadel are available at the Citadel box office.  
The Walterdale Theatre presents Erika Ritter's *The Girl I left Behind Me*, Milne's *The Man in the Bowler Hat*, and Jerome Lawrence's *Live Spelled Backwards*. The one-act plays run from Mar. 1 to 5 and performances begin at 8:30 p.m.  
Theatre Three's presentation of Brendan Behan's *The Hostage* runs until Feb. 26. Performances start at 8 p.m. with tickets available at Hudson's Bay box offices and at the Theatre Three box office phone 426-6870. The theatre is located at 10426-95 St.

### cinema

National Film Theatre's Classic Gangster Series features *Brother Orchid* (USA 1940) on Friday Feb. 26. Edward G. Robinson and Humphrey Bogart star in the tale of a mob leader's search for "real class." The Eastern European Cinema series features *Magasiskola* (The Falcons) (Hungary 1970) this evening. The films both start at 8 p.m. and are shown in the Central Library Theatre.  
Cinemateque 16 presents *Pride of the Yankees* (USA 1942) on Thurs. Feb. 24. The film is part of the Gary Cooper series. Friday's Bette Davis series presentation is *Mr. Skeffington* (USA 1944) Sunday's fifties Western Series presentation is *Bend of the River* (USA 1952). Thurs. and Fri. showings are at 7:30 p.m. Sunday showings at 2 p.m.

## A camp *Hostage* fails to provoke

An able Theatre Three cast in *The Hostage*.



by Alan Filewod

In 1958, when the present text was devised by Joan Littlewood's Theatre Workshop, from a scenario by Brendan Behan, *The Hostage* was a savagely comic indictment of the violence caused by the complex political situation in Northern Ireland. The anger behind the play was not impartial; Littlewood's theatre was committed to left-wing politics, and Behan himself had served time in an English prison, after a futile attempt to bomb the Liverpool shipyards for the IRA nearly twenty years earlier.

The play that emerged from Behan's scenario was the result of a collaboration between director, playwright, and actors. From a story-line that might be expected to fill a one-act play, they produced a three-act theatrical event combining elements of conventional melodrama, vaudeville, and manic Irish revue humour.

*The Hostage* revolves around the simple tale of a young and naive English conscript kidnapped by the IRA, who learns that he will be shot in retaliation if the British proceed with a scheduled hanging in Belfast. After winning the sympathies of the misfit whores and Easter Uprising veterans who people the Dublin house that serves as his prison, the soldier is killed during a police raid. The story is meagre, but it serves as the organizational thread for what amounts to a collage of songs, character sketches, and theatrical gags, all of which highlight the cruel injustices of political repression and terrorism. The play, developed in the spirit of an Irish "time," used topical references and outrageous humour to confront the audience with a disturbing picture of pathos and clowning.

That was in 1958. Nineteen years later, Mark Schoenberg has selected *The Hostage* as the inaugural production in Theatre 3's new space on 95th Str. As the opening-night performance ended, I felt disappointed and found it difficult to join in the applause. It was not only inadequacies of design and staging which left a bitter taste; I had read, just the day before, a simple statistic which colored my perception of the play. I wish it had colored Schoenberg's.

The statistic was one of many such which crowd the wire services daily, and to which we have become immune. In the past eight years, 1,702 persons have died prematurely as a result of sectarian violence in Northern Ireland.

The violence that impelled Behan to originate *The Hostage* has escalated into a civil war since, and I cannot but wonder if by ignoring that escalation, Schoenberg has done us—and Behan—a disservice. Presumably, Schoenberg felt that the play still stands on its own, that its strident rage is yet effective. Unfortunately, it isn't so.

As *The Hostage* was conceived as a topical entertainment, its gags and political references have dated beyond repair. In 1958, mentions of De Valera and Harold Macmillan had political meaning to an audience; today they are mere historical footnotes. Similarly, the campy homosexual routines were risqué, and deliberately provocative in the days when the staid Lord Chamberlain's office could exercise censorship.

*The Hostage* was unashamedly sensationalistic. But in 1977, camp is common, and often tiresome. So it was this production.

I find it difficult to understand why Schoenberg decided to remain faithful to the published text. By doing so, he lost the opportunity to encourage meaningful commitment in his actors, and he lost the sense of wild play that is so vital to the style of *The Hostage*. The many jokes and bawdy puns which provide so much of the humour should be delivered with the riotous spirit of, for example, *The Goon Show*. Schoenberg delineated them with pedantic temporality, mutuating Behan's mania into slick Broadway trivia.

Schoenberg approached the play as dramatic literature, which it is not, and cast the parts according to the merits of available actors, rather than developing an ensemble. The result was an imbalanced production. The lead roles were generally well-performed; the minor roles were dutifully performed. But in a play of this style, there should be no criteria or major and minor. The smaller parts require actors as gifted as the leads, if their function in the play is to be mutually coherent.

That is not to suggest that the play lacks good performances. Some of the actors, notably Linda Rabinovich as a spinster who confuses libido and religion, and Ray Hunt as the Cockney soldier, gave evidence of the madcap qualities that, if extended, could make the play a joy to watch. On the whole, however, I was too conscious of actors striving for believability as characters, instead of individually exploring the comic possibilities of a macabre situation.

Schoenberg compounded the problem by what seemed to be a desire to demonstrate the versatility of his new theatre. The play was staged on a platform of roughly the dimensions of a railway car, with the audience on two sides. The concept is promising, but in this case, inappropriate.

Instead of providing a sense of intimacy, which requires more than proximity to the audience, the play confined the actors to a restricted and visually uncomfortable space. At best it was awkward; at worst, with nineteen actors running around in a desperate attempt to simulate a police raid, it was confusing.

Schoenberg and his cast would have been better served by an open playing area, with no attempt to create realism. Such a space would allow for the flexibility and freedom of movement the play needs.

At the end of *The Hostage*, the dead soldier jumps up and lead the cast in singing "there's no place on earth like the world." The song works well as an audacious punch-line of a grand joke, but in the production the joke was missing.

The play exposed nothing, and argued nothing, and was too safe. Ideally we should leave *The Hostage* with a feeling of disturbance that comes of allowing ourselves to laugh at a situation that has murdered thousands. If the play is to evoke that guilt, the actors must be committed, not just emotionally, but politically, as human beings faced with an obscene reality. Otherwise, those thousands of deaths add up to one more statistic, and *The Hostage* is reduced to an Irish *Hogan's Heroes*.