

entertainment

Fineberg's zany 'Life on Mars'

By Elliott Lefko

Toronto playwright Larry Fineberg, a second cousin to Television's *My Three Sons* Ernie Douglas, is busy, busy, very busy. The physically slim reservoir of fresh ideas is sitting in the offices of the Toronto Free Theatre wearing checkered vest, rimless glasses and sporting a trim beard. In the midst of writing a novel, completing the second draft of a screenplay, *Nightmare*, awaiting a new production of his third play, *Death*, at New York's Colonnade Theatre, and *Devotion*, a new comedy for Theatre Plus; Fineberg drives himself by putting the virgin-tested *Life On Mars* on its feet for a Toronto Free Theatre run.

Born in Montreal in 1945, the university graduate has since fashioned eleven plays. *Life on Mars*, which premiered on Wednesday after two weeks of previews, is a departure from previous form.

"In the past, writing for theatres such as New, Free or Passe Muraille, my plays were experimental; working with new forms and styles. This time I wanted to produce an old-fashioned Broadway comedy. One with a beginning, middle and end. I wanted it accessible; I didn't want

anyone walking away saying they couldn't understand it because the lighting was too dark, or that they couldn't translate the metaphors. No, in this play the actors say what they feel."

Life On Mars three-act plot centres around a one-book author, a bitchy but adorable wife and a young man, a great admirer of the author's work. The characters have personalities that cry for laughter: the writer, a bisexual who seeks out local talent at Banff's School of Fine Arts, an artist wife with failed exhibit behind her, and character Mark Mendelsohn, young man, somewhat psychologically disturbed, looking for something/someone to channel his excessive enthusiasm into. Despite a comically-loaded script, Fineberg, director Eric Steiner and the cast of Frank Maraden, Dixie Seattle and Talph Benmergui found laughter a distant planet during preview. Fineberg candidly remarks: "I've had to submit the script to constant rewriting, as well as restaging of the actors' movements. During previews we've had interesting audience response. Some nights the audience has been progressive, laughing along with the jokes. But for the most part they did not find it funny. Either they didn't understand it, or maybe, because of the nature of some of the material, they were scared of it. We had to rewrite almost half the first scene."

To the subject of rewriting, the wiry, somewhat harried dramatist brings forth a wealth of information. From the notes on his play *Eve* (Theatrebooks 1977): "I'm a compulsive rewriter. I always marvel at those playwrights who never change a word from first rehearsal to opening. I marvel at what must be their genius, or their insularity. Because when a scene is staged you can see what's wrong, where it might go. Or the actors. As you get to see them work you find out what they might do. And if your actors are good, you want to give them more, make things better;

Not long ago Fineberg found himself on the campus of a University. During a lecture on "The Inner Workings of Larry

Fineberg," the decorated (Chalmers Award for Best Canadian Play) scenario writer ran into a situation he finds very disturbing. "Their was a real lack of passion from the students; a lack of commitment for what they

were studying and a general ignorance of what was happening in the Canadian theatre scene. I couldn't talk about my other plays because outside of *Eve*, most have never heard of them, let alone seen them." Crowded schedule ahead,

further success hardly guaranteed, a calm Fineberg perches precariously, leaning back on chair. He rocks too far, losing balance. The second time he's done this. Sheepish, for an instant, he recovers and tries once again.

Only Paper Today benefit

By Stuart Ross

Where were you, anyways? You know what I'm talking about. On Valentine's Day at 8:30 p.m. That's no excuse. You should have been at Gallery 76 for the *Only Paper Today Benefit Reading*. Everybody was there. Truman and Bianca couldn't make it, but Opal and Crad were there.

Altogether about 100 people crammed into the tiny room tucked in the back of the gallery, and the night was really successful, great fun, although it didn't exactly bring in the millions. You see, *Only Paper Today*, which was begun almost ten years ago by Vic d'Or (a Victor Colemanesque figure), and has become an institution, is running out of money (take note, wealthy widow art patrons). Seems the government has cut off supplies. So, Hermann Neutics, one of *OPT's* editors (along with Opal L. Nations and Vic d'Or) organized the gala to generate some interest about the paper.

The reading was kicked off with some great prose by Robert Fones, whose *Licquorice All-Sorts Man* still runs loose notoriously. Later on, Vic d'Or did an excellent surprise set of his prose and some new poetry. Writer and photographer David Hlynsky then appeared dressed entirely in National Enquirer front pages and

presented a hypnosis tape accompanied by slides of Enquirer headlines, interspersed with photos of white mice. Really soothing. Actually, all the sets were quite good (my astounding



Gary Hershorn

modesty prevents me from going into any detail about my own, which I began with a demented schizo Welsh folk-song), but the great highlight of the evening was the last bit: Crad Kilodney's live debut. He knocked out the entire audience with a couple of sledgehammer stories about the writer's condition. With incredible perception he described the psychological horrors that an author (*Peat Mosses of Canada*) goes through when he accidentally sneezes down the back of Jack McClelland's neck at the O'Keefe Centre. Kilodney was a fitting end to an enjoyable and lunatic evening.

All of the readers have con-

tributed in the past to *Only Paper Today*, a Toronto literary journal which provides a forum for all sorts of alternative, experimental, and avant-garde writing. "The writing in *OPT*," says Neutics, "doesn't represent a capital - A aesthetic, it's an international collective eclectic effort."

The recent issue, *Fringe Detective*, shows that *OPT* is always where things are happening, always on top of the literary scene. Detective writing is fast becoming the 'in' genre (sci-fi and Harlequin romances, alas, are out), the hardboiled dick is the '79 model. *Only Paper* is on its toes, letting you - the reading public - know where it's at. With some much-needed money from Art Metropole (so kind) *OPT* projects at least another 3 issues: an all-collage issue by David Young, an all-glass issue, and possibly, an all-comics issue.

Only Paper Today's credibility lies in its ability not to take itself too seriously, not to take literature too seriously. It is dedicated to giving the public something a little different, and to exposing new talent. Literature (like the mind), is like a parachute, it only works when open. It is like a fish-hook, it cannot catch anything without a wriggling worm. Or like an electric razor chucked into a bathtub, it only works when it's plugged in.

Screening

The Department of Film presents two special screenings of Romanian Films on successive Tuesdays, starting March 6th. The festival, organized by Eugene Buia and dedicated to York's James Beveridge, brings to the screen *Through the Ashes of the Empire* (1970) and the *Stone Wedding* (1973). Both films have received much international acclaim but very limited viewing in North America. *Through the Ashes of the Empire*, an adventure story about the destiny of two men who master the tragedy and horror of the Austrian-Hungarian War, commences at 7 pm, March 6th, in Curtis L. and promises to attract a distinguished audience

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