

First pro play for Papavs

interview by Carol Amerongen

Vikie Papavs is sporting short bangs, a tweed cap, and knee length shorts. The recent graduate of the University of Alberta's B.F.A. Acting Programme is about to go on stage — in her first professional role — as Bernhardt, the eleven year old Austrian nephew of Jacob Grossman in Workshop West Theatre's opening production of *The Rich Man*.

The Rich Man is adapted by Joanne Osborne and Gerry Potter from the 1947 novel by Henry Kreisel, a recently retired professor and administrator at the University of Alberta. Most of the play takes place in 1935 Vienna, a city becoming increasingly dangerous for a Jewish family like the Grossmans.

Jacob Grossman is the uncle who, after living in Canada for 33 years, returns to Austria pretending to be a wealthy businessman. Grossman begins to believe his own fantasy, and the theme of self-deception is mirrored in the attitude of the Austrian Jews who refuse to recognize the rise of anti-Semitism.

Papavs' character, Bernhardt, and his brother Herman (played by Marjorie Campbell) are like any other young boys; they are enthralled by visitors, have secret hiding places and dream of wonderful things to come.

What is it like trying to play an eleven year old boy?

"It's hard," says Papavs, "you see eleven year olds and they have certain qualities...but

Programme. Papavs did not find York's programme very challenging, so after two years she came to the University of Alberta. She enthuses, "The U of A has an excellent on stage, that can be really jarring. The audience knows that I'm a) not a boy, and b) not eleven, so there's no sense in breaking my back trying to be an eleven year old boy. I just have them accept that this is what I am in the storytelling process."

The native of Brampton, Ontario originally thought she would study Chemical Engineering, but at the last minute changed her mind and entered the York University Acting training programme.

According to Papavs, one of the advantages of the University of Alberta is the valuable exposure the students get during their third year: "There's a lot of profile for U of A actors. Our shows are seen on studio stage and that's when audiences come. You also get reviewed in the papers. It makes the job a little easier when you get out."

So far, Vikie Papavs and the eleven other members of her graduating class are all employed. "We've been fortunate that way," she says, "other classes (are) the same too. A lot of people have left the U of A and stayed in Edmonton."

Papavs also experienced the Toronto theatre scene. "It was a terribly difficult community to break into." So she has decided to stay in Edmonton for a while. "There's a lot of quality work to go around," adds Papavs. "I think the city has a lot to offer."

The Rich Man wins

The Rich Man
Workshop West
Kaasa Theatre
runs till October 18

review by Carol Amerongen

The current adaptation of Henry Kreisel's novel *The Rich Man*, is being performed at the Kaasa Theatre by Workshop West Theatre. Kreisel, a recently retired professor and administrator at the University of Alberta, wrote the play in 1947, while living in Toronto as a student. The novel was adapted for the stage by Joanne Osborne and Gerry Potter, also the play's director.

The Rich Man is about a poor Jewish factory worker in Toronto, Jacob Grossman, who uses his life savings to visit his family in Austria. But after 33 years, and many letters describing a prosperous living, Jacob can't possibly return home a poor man. Instead, Jacob assumes the role of a wealthy businessman and he arrives in 1935 Vienna wearing a new whitesuit, carrying a suitcase full of gifts, hoping to impress family and friends. Of course the first lie leads to more lies and Jacob gets in over his head. Grossman's predicament is increasingly funny but its direct result is humorous.

This play focuses on self-deception: both that of Jacob Grossman and the Austrian Jews of 1935. Grossman wants so much to impress his family that he almost believes his own lie. His personal blindness is paralleled on another level by the inattentiveness of those Austrian Jews who refuse to face the growing threat of anti-semitism. Ironically, it is through Jacob that the audience is aware of a changed Vienna, which is not as lively as it was during his youth.

Adapting a novel into a play must create some difficulties. But Osborne and Potter appear to have taken advantage of a unique situation and produced a clever script. Each actor doubles as a narrator to tell the audience some part of the story that can't be acted out, like a character's thoughts or a complicated setting. People, rather than props, become machine equipment or parts of an abstract painting. They are also responsible for a variety of sound effects. On top of all this, every actor plays a number of characters. At one point, the entire cast becomes a circus troop and performs a series of stunts, including an impressive unicycle routine.

Only a talented and well-trained cast could carry this play. Blair Haynes is perfect as the idealistic Jacob Grossman. It's not just a good accent and true appearance that makes Haynes believable. He talks, he moves, he behaves like the guy who goes to extremes to gain acceptance; you like him because of his kindness, although you resent his motives. Jude Jerry is excellent as lake's sister Shaendl. Shaendl is a realistic woman who, like Jacob, has a kind heart; but unlike Jacob, has the ability to be honest with herself. The role of Jacob's older sister Manya, a loud and overly-frank meddler, is flawlessly played by Jane Heather. Marjorie Campbell and Vikie Papavs play Herman and Bernhardt, Jacob's precocious nephews. Both actresses are convincing as little boys. They don't come off as girls trying to play young boys; instead, after the first few minutes you forget about the actresses and see only the characters.

The Rich Man runs until October 18th at the Kaasa Theatre. Performances start every evening at 8 p.m. with a Sunday Matinee at 2 p.m. Workshop West's season premiere is certainly worth catching.



Vikie Papavs as eleven-year-old Bernhardt Grossman.

Jail through Men's Eyes needs more focus

Fortune and Men's Eyes
Matrix Repertory Company
at Theatre Nexus
runs till October 18

review by Terry Gale

The strength of John Herbert's play *Fortune and Men's Eyes* lies in its graphic depiction of the harsh brutality of a Canadian reformatory for young men. The play is a terrifying and shocking journey into the lives of four offenders. It was actually based on Herbert's own experience in 1946 when he served six months in the Guelph reformatory for gross indecency. Unfortunately, the production of the play by the Matrix Repertory Company falls short of capturing the intensity of this gritty drama.

Fortune and Men's Eyes focuses on the character of Smitty, a naive youth who is serving time for a first offence. Smitty is sharing a cell with three other young men, each of whom is experienced in dealing with the daily politics of prison life. Rocky is a hard, coarse youth who is a two-bit hustler; Queenie is an outrageous and brutal bitch; Mona is a fragile victim of his effeminate nature. As the play progresses, each one initiates Smitty into the prison's power system and leaves his effect on Smitty's character.

The Matrix Repertory Company production of *Fortune and Men's Eyes* is not without its moments, but it does not quite capture the brutal and stark intensity of the work. What is lacking is a building up of dramatic tension.

The audience should feel uncomfortable watching the way these men exploit each other in their struggle for domination. Under Robert Dorness' direction, there is no suspense and therefore the audience does not feel the fear and desparation that these men are experiencing. For instance, the scene in which Rocky forces Smitty to become his "punk" is graphically violent, but the audience fails to feel apprehensive.

Of all the actors in this production, Bill MacDonald stands out with his portrayal of the sensual yet brutal Queenie. He commands the stage with his flamboyant gestures and bitchy remarks. Underlying this exterior is a harsh, ugly combination of bitterness, anger and desparation which is missing from the rest of this production.

Vincent Gale's portrayal of Rocky manages to capture the youth's roughness and his barbaric charm. However, he fails to show the stark brutality of a man who would violate and use people the way Rocky does. Also missing from his performance is an intelligible change in Rocky's cocky behaviour when Smitty turns the tables on him.

John Little's portrayal of Mona succeeds in depicting the character's weak nature. One of the highlights of the production is Mona's account of his victimization at the hands of the Canadian justice system. Little brings an honesty and intensity to this moment that draws in the audience. Unfortunately, Little does not capture the essence of Mona's effemininity needed in order for the audience to understand why the cop took one look at the men and shifted his sympathy from Mona to the gang that was beating him up.

The big disappointment of the cast is Mark Dobbelsteyn's Smitty. Dobbelsteyn is fine at the beginning of the play with his portrayal of the naive youth trying to adjust to his new surroundings. What is lacking in his performance is the intensity of anger and pain that would come from someone who had been raped. Also lacking is the subtle change that slowly occurs in Smitty's personality as he gradually becomes so bitter and hostile that he rebels against Rocky, uses Queenie, and attempts to gain control of Mona.

The simple, even stark set with its gaudy colours is just right for this play. The set does not distract from the action of the play but adds to the tense, claustrophobic atmosphere of the prison. However, what was needed in this play was more focus on this tension between the men themselves.



The return of the rich relative to 1935 Vienna.