

Masten rides Three Men on a Horse to Citadel

interview by Randal Smathers

What's the first question you ask an actor who you've never heard of before, whose most recent credits include *Gorillas in the Mist*, and *Letters with Jane Fonda* and Robert DeNiro? On a cold December night, you ask him what the hell he's doing in Edmonton.

The answer for Gordon Masten — in town to play Clarence Dobbins in the Citadel's *Three Men on a Horse* — was easy: "When somebody offers me a part in a play like this, I'd be stupid not to be involved."

The play appealed to Masten, who described it as "a piece of Americana that's a little different in style from most." The play was written in 1935 by George

Abbott and John Cecil Holm, and movie buffs may have seen it recently in CBC's *Movie Late Night*.

Masten was also interested by the part. Clarence Dobbins is "the heavy of the piece," in Masten's words. "When I left the audition, I knew it was mine, and I asked myself 'Do I really want the role?' It's not a huge role, it's not a particularly funny role, (but) I wanted to know if I could make it funny."

You won't find Masten haunting 24 Hour Video, looking for a tape of the movie version, however. "It's enough that the play's been written. It's quite a good script." He was also concerned that he would end up imitating the screen Dobbins: "I might do part of him, instead of me." Most Clarences have also "yelled a lot. I'd

like to do him without yelling."

Masten is a veteran actor, having worked as one for 14 years. However, he is not a star. "That's Canadian culture," he laughed. "People don't know us through our theatre or film, they know us through our commercial ads on TV." Working out of Toronto, Masten is also no stranger to touring. He did 200 shows of *The Hobbit* for a children's theatre company on the road, "as Gollum... the back end of Gollum."

Now, Masten prefers to work in Toronto, so he can stay with his family, but he likes the West. "There's a freshness out here," he said, as opposed to Toronto's regimented theatre community.

Despite the variety of his work, which includes not only theatre, TV ads, and

movies, but also cartoon voice-overs, Masten denies that he — or actors in general — get schizophrenic. "I don't change who I am, I just make the role me," he said.

Despite this, Masten was quite capable of slipping in and out of character — not just Dobbins, but various others as well — throughout our conversation. If his dinner-table Dobbins is a worthwhile guide, his Citadel Clarence should be very funny indeed.

The show runs at the Citadel from December 7 to January 1. It is directed by Randal Hoey, whose credits range, like Masten's, from opera to television (he directed *All My Children*). It also stars Citadel regular Richard McMillan as Erwin, and U of A grad Sandy Tucker as his wife Audrey.

Arts & Entertainment

Local actor Haslam finds his genie as *Aladdin*

interview by Cathy Duong

Watching Jeff Haslam fumbling around some shrubs following the direction "the sillier the better" from a photographer, one can hardly imagine the actor in a serious light. Haslam, referring to his poses, quips, "now all my old professors can see what a serious actor I am."

On the contrary, Haslam regards his work with a very professional attitude. Originally from Lethbridge, Haslam is a U of A graduate. He speaks fondly of his old classmates, some of whom remain his closest friends. As well, many of us might remember Haslam from such plays as *Bub Slug: The Musical*, *The Last Bus* (Theatre Network); *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (The Fringe, Stage West) and the recent *Burn This* (Citadel).

This time Haslam plays the principal role in *Aladdin*, the English panto debuting this Friday at the MacLab Theatre. Haslam promises that *Aladdin* will be "a lot of fun." This panto, based on the Thousand and One Nights tale, consists of music, dance, jokes and even a song sung to the theme of *Love Boat*. In *Aladdin*, Haslam gets to sing ballads instead of his usual high-energy rock and roll songs.

Referring to past experience, Haslam

says, "when I look back on the roles I've played professionally, however few they may be... because I just graduated in 1986... I don't want to start sounding like a big deal... my most challenging and satisfying roles have been Shakespeare, Shaw and modern plays." He would like to be in an outstanding Canadian play one day and also the chance to portray Hamlet when he is old enough. For now, he will try to get in shape for his next project, one of the many in his future plans. His role in *The Artificial Jungle* (Phoenix) will be a rambunctious one.

Haslam maintains a positive attitude towards his profession and his co-workers, many of whom he admires greatly, including Larry Yachimec, whose name pops up often during our conversation. Haslam tries to sustain integrity in his work. He says "one of the pitfalls of performing is pushing too hard because as soon as your performance isn't true you lose the audience. The audience is like another part of your play because they are an active aspect and there is no reason to tell the story if they aren't there." Haslam's passion for his profession is apparent when he says "it will be when hell freezes over before I quit acting."

Aladdin plays the MacLab family theatre in the Citadel December 9 through 25.



Dragos Ruiu

Jeff Haslam takes on the lead role in *Aladdin*, up next in the Citadel's MacLab family series.

Lana Lust's fantasy play is hilariously offensive

Lana Lust: The Bitch Stops Here
Phoenix Downtown
through December 11

review by Kevin Law

The lights go down in the intimate, almost seedy club-like atmosphere of tables, chairs, booze and black velvet lined walls. The throbbing, anticipatory music is turned up. The audience applauds. And then, she makes her entrance from the back of the house, twinkling under a spot light, garbed in gaudy tinsel.

It's Canada's sweetheart, drag queen extraordinaire Lana Lust. As she reaches the stage, the unholy vision presented to us of male body hair thrusting through ripped fish-net stockings and between deadly pointed falsies, reaffirms the fact that this will be no ordinary evening of fringe theatre.

Initially, one may wonder if the novelty of the play hinges on the fact that a drag queen is simply standing on stage telling dirty jokes, but Staines quickly dispels all such notions with a high energy performance that lampoons all things female and Canadian by combining self depreciating wit with bitchy arrogance and liberal use of four letter words.

With "clever make up application" and "fabulous fashions", Lana chronicles her dream to become Miss Canada in a series of mini-vignettes that trace Lana's rise to stardom, and it is here that Staines' eye for grotesque camp reaches its height. Particularly facetious is Lana's cross country run in support of Connie Francis, a biting satire of Canada's penchant for producing media personalities from cross country trekkers running for a cause.

Lana's exaggerated running mannerisms

are absurdly hilarious as she almost gets run down by cars on the highway, obliging her to accept a ride from a truck driver which leads to yet another comic scene.

Staines seems to know that there are few borders in this burlesque, bathhouse style of drag presentation, and he plays it to the hilt, caring little if he offends. He readily denigrates people in the audience or berates hecklers. Admittedly, some of Lana's jokes groan under the weight of vulgarity, but Staines is having fun on

He readily denigrates people in the audience...

stage and his pure camp energy sustains the audience, a compliment to a performer whose character is purely reactionary.

Staines' credit lies in his ability to sustain the comedic achievement of his vulgar character Lana Lust, while at the same time expounding a tongue in cheek parody of dreams and fantasies. Perhaps the only real weak point occurs when Staines forcefully points out the illusion of his character at the end of the play through a maudlin confession of Lana's true gender. This was at least partially redeemed, however, by its illumination of Lana's real metaphor about the foolish and tacky dreams we sometimes seek by putting on a facade.

Lana Lust: The Bitch Stops Here, is a funny, crude, and rude show performed by a first rate comic. It is an off the wall and truly offensive performance that shouldn't be missed.



Kevin Law

Kent Staines as the one and only Lana Lust: his one-person show is a barrel of laughs with a message.