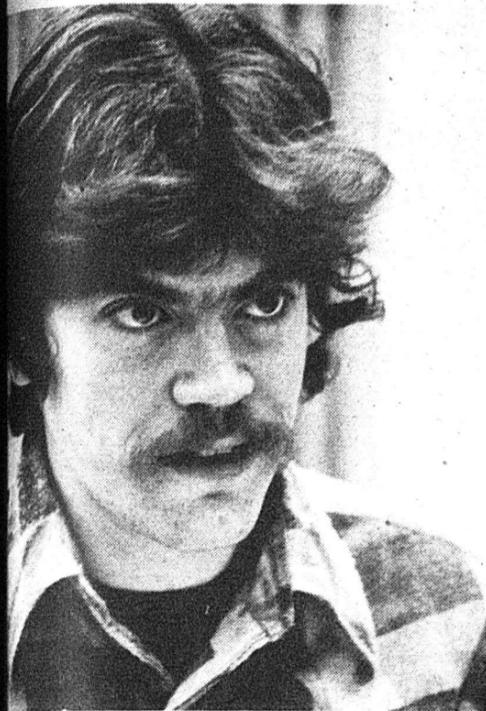


New group works for its audiences

Don McIntosh

In 1973 Gerry Potter wrote the first comprehensive study of modern Canadian drama. It was an ambitious project for the 23 year old Edmonton honors student, but then Gerry Potter is an ambitious man. Now, after graduating with an MFA in directing from the U of A last spring, Potter is transforming theory to action.



Potter

He has formed a new theatre company, *Workshop Playwrights' Theatre*, which will open a three season at Espace Tournesol on March 14, with playwright Rick McNair's *Punch and Judy*. He is the theatre's artistic director. Mr. Potter has three objectives: the production of new and popular Canadian plays.

He speaks unpretentiously about a renaissance in Canadian theatre (in 1973 more than 100 new plays were written and produced, matching the previous year's total).

But the large theatres are slow to recognize this, and consequently audiences are uninformed about the trend is changing, however, "as the artistic directors begin to realize just how popular Canadian theatre is; how much people want to see themselves on stage; that it works; it sells."

Potter believes the first task of Workshop West is to find a wide audience; to gain support. He has little difficulty gaining support from playwrights and actors across Canada. (The theatre's board of directors includes Jim De Felice and Gordon Downie, two Edmonton playwrights). But gaining support from arts institutions and powerful patrons is another story.

Potter says a major cause of inertia in these areas is due to a colonial attitude on the part of the established arts administrators and directors.

We're up against the idea that if a play comes from a cultural centre like London or New York, it's bound to be better. It's an idea the media and the arts institutions have helped to propagate and consequently we've been able to sell it to audiences. But there's an audience that I don't think is ready to believe

and it is this audience Potter hopes to attract with a programme of popular Canadian plays; half from Edmonton, half from other parts of Canada.

Potter distinguishes popular theatre from commercial theatre, and considers the future of theatre in Edmonton. Popular theatre respects people. Commercial theatre treats theatre as a commodity and panders to the lowest common denominator of taste in the audience.

"Audiences are often under-estimated. Theatre is booming in Edmonton now, but how long is it going to last unless it really starts talking to the majority?"

Financial obstacles have given Potter his largest headaches. *Workshop West* must raise \$17,000 to operate this season. It is a paltry sum when compared to the production budgets of large regional theatres, such as the Citadel, but it is immense for a new company.

New companies are not eligible for government funds and corporations are hesitant to back a fledgling group. Which leaves the people at large.

Potter hopes to raise most of the money through small donations from individuals, from advance season ticket sales and from memberships.

In addition, to raise seed money Potter is organizing a benefit at the Riverdale Community Hall Feb. 17. Advance tickets are available by calling Gerry

Potter at 436-7378.

Potter is under no illusions about the survival of the theatre. He refers to the struggle fought by alternative theatres in Toronto during the late 60s and early 70s to establish a Canadian presence in the theatres. It is a struggle which is not finished. Potter concludes:

"We're starting to win, but people who think Canadian plays are predominant are living in a dream world. We still have to fight to present people with the theatre that is relevant to them in an immediate way. We're going to have to struggle for this theatre to stay alive. I've felt like giving up several times already just in trying to organize the theatre, because everywhere you meet with opposition from people in powerful positions. But if there's an audience there for it, eventually we'll make it. And I think the audience exists."



ORCHESIS, the university dance group, presents its annual program this Thursday, Friday and Saturday in SUB Theatre. See review in Tuesday's Gateway. Photo by Shirley Glew.

Full points to Sisters' latest

The Pointer Sisters
Energy

Record review by Richard Desjardins

Rarely in pop music does an established group explore a new direction in mid career with any success. *Energy*, the new album by June, Ruth and Anita Pointer is one of those rare musical events when artists are capable of creating magic.

Known in the past primarily for their energetic jazz scatting and outlandish 40's period style dress, as the Pointers, minus sister Bonnie, have come up with a solid rock offering, featuring some of rock music's best writers, produced by Richard Perry, best known for his work with Carly Simon and Leo Sayer.

Whether the Pointers are harmonizing or trading off lead vocals, every track is a knockout on this aptly named album. Standouts include Steely Dan's "Dirty Work", Bob Welch's "Hypnotized", Stephen Stills's

"As I Come Of Age" and Loggins and Messina's "Angry Eyes". The most outstanding track is undoubtedly Bruce Springsteen's "Fire", currently receiving massive exposure on AM Radio and giving the ladies their first hit in years. Especially effective is Waddy Wachtel's guitar work and the subtle use of synthesizers.

Why this new direction? That's anyone's guess, but the Pointers have been sincere in their vocal art in the past. Staying well away from the disco copout to obtain a hit, this recording is as sincere as their past pop-jazz recordings and for that reason alone should receive recognition.

Apart from the Isley Brothers and perhaps the Commodores, the Pointers may well be pointing out the direction that a whole "new wave" of black artists may be taking in the 1980's. Anyway you look at it, this record is destined to become a classic.

Calendar

Time	Place	Event
8:00 pm	Room 1-29 Fine Arts Bldg	Violin Recital Cathy Hudson
noon	Second Floor Foyer Fine Arts Bldg	Informal Student Recitals
8:00 pm	Old Arts Bldg Convocation Hall	Opera Performance <i>Dr. Mirade</i> by Georges Bizet <i>The Medium</i> by Gian Carlo Manotti