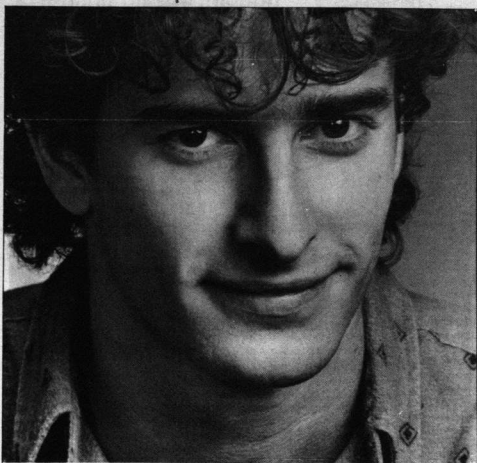


U of A BFA Akman and penguins



U of A BFA grad Andrew Akman

by L. Robertson

The intense and demanding nature of the BFA program makes it the perfect form of preparation for the professional actor. Andrew Akman, a recent graduate of the U of A's Faculty of Fine Arts offers himself as an example.

"I emerged from the University of Manitoba with a degree in political studies. I knew almost nothing about acting when I came to the U of A, but I was curious. When I was accepted to the BFA program the change was astounding. Basically, I was turned into a working actor for the next three years."

Since graduation, Akman has appeared in the Vancouver production of *Geeks in Love* and *Elmo's Rainbow*, featured in this summer's Fringe Festival. Most recently, Akman has landed a position in *Penguins*, a current production of the Edmonton based drama company Theatre Network.

According to Akman, the intense training involved in the BFA program is a great help in achieving success as a professional.

"The program," he says, "combines a heavy emphasis on classical training with the aspect of 'gut work' (learning to reach primal emotions and channel them into your character)."

During the program, the BFA student acquires classical training in language, dance, mime, and stage lighting, while achieving emotional appreciation. These different aspects are constantly woven together in the practical experience of performing play.

Describes Akman: "In the program I spent twelve to fourteen hours a day, six or seven days a week pursuing my degree. I practically lived with my classmates."

Akman also notes that the department staff are extremely strict and demand great discipline and effort from their students. He recalls an episode from his first year in the program to illustrate this attitude. "I took part of one Friday afternoon off to visit my parents in Winnipeg that weekend. I was really missing them. After I got back, one of my profs cornered me and questioned my commitment to the program. He really gave me hell."

While Akman acknowledges that theatre is a demanding lifestyle, he is cautious of becoming too absorbed. "Theatre doesn't have to consume you. In fact it shouldn't. If it does, you likely won't do good work."

As mentioned, Akman is currently working for Theatre Network, which he describes as his "favorite" theatre company in Edmonton. "They only do new works, by Canadian

writers, directed by Canadian directors and acted by Canadian actors. It's just like CBC!" he jokes.

The play itself, *Penguins*, is written by Canadian Michael D.C. McKinlay. You may recognize McKinlay from his other works, notably *Walk and Roy*, and the rock musical comedy *Papa Died Under One of Those Great Big Heads on Easter Island*.

McKinlay uses *Penguins* to delve into the human spirit as he hypothesizes the effects of scientific research led astray by Man's "lust for domination and control over those around him." The play focuses on a research team studying penguins in Antarctica. Under the leadership of Dr. Melton, the team experiments with radio signals to control — or disrupt — the migratory instincts of the birds.

But as the experiments continue, even after success is achieved, it slowly becomes evident that something more sinister is afoot. The crew, at first blindly committed to Dr. Melton, eventually begin to question their increasingly peculiar observations. The bizarre effects of paranoia are observed as it slowly becomes evident that more than one experiment is being performed here.

Akman plays Dickey, the estranged son of Dr. Melton who develops a close relationship with the penguins. "The play is being billed as a suspenseful drama, but it's more than that," comments Akman. "There's comedy too. The second half of the play is largely black comedy. In the end, it's downright bizarre."

Akman also emphasizes the particular mood of the play, which in part stems from the contrast between cold, calculating science, and the intense emotional experiences of the researchers. "There are some very intelligent writers that can quite accurately represent factual material in a play. But there has to be a balance. Either you get a play that is so intelligent that it's boring, or you wind up with plays that are all passion and no substance. This is one of the few plays that offers a compromise. McKinlay is one of those very intelligent writers. But he has really let his feelings go on this one."

After *Penguins*, Akman will be with Catalyst Theatre in *Feeling Yes/ Feeling No*, a production about child abuse which tours to elementary schools. Akman likes the program because it "teaches children what child abuse is. It often exposes and prevents cases of abuse in the process. It's a very worthwhile endeavor. Unfortunately, although forty two Edmonton schools have requested the production, education cutbacks have limited the number of shows to seven."

In the meantime, Akman is absorbed with his current project. *Penguins* plays at Theatre Network from Nov. 19 — Dec. 6.

Colour & light alright

Elmer Bischoff
Paintings from the 1980's
Fine Arts Building Gallery
Run ends November 29

Interview and review by Cathy Duong

What combines the colours of red, orange, purple, blue, green, yellow, violet, turquoise and pink all in one? No, it's not a kaleidoscope — it is a painting by Elmer Bischoff currently on display at the Fine Arts Building Gallery.

This respected artist is currently visiting the University of Alberta Department of Art and Design. Bischoff was born in Berkeley, there he received his masters of Fine Arts Degree from the University of California in 1939. Bischoff's current work deals mainly with abstract art.

Bischoff says that he is "always enjoying what he is doing at the present." Working on one painting at a time, and making no future plans about further projects.

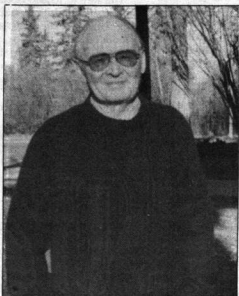
As for the skeptics of abstract art, Bischoff thinks that they will have to look at a lot of this form of art in order to get acquainted with it. Bischoff admires many art forms, dating as far back as the cro-magnon's time. He has an "immense appreciation for cave-men work" and some of his modern favourites include Susan Rotherberg, Francis Bacon, and Anselm Kiefer.

Bischoff is presently visiting classes of the Department of Art and Design to look at students' works and to talk to them. His advice to young artists is "you just have to keep working hard." He also comments that his welcoming party has been very kind and warm, and contrasts this to the cold weather in Edmonton.

Bischoff's exhibition at the U of A offers many colorful paintings which only have numbers for names. For example #61, 1981 is a painting of explosive colours with bold and energetic lines. The artist's energy can be perceived from his work through the strong slashes across his pictures and the use of vibrant shades of colors.

Interesting colour combinations such as red, orange, and turquoise together can be seen in his paintings. The artist's versatility is shown in his other works such as "Country Room", 1957. It shows a picture in shades of blue of a woman sitting on a bed. Here the picture is done in smoother, more subdued strokes in contrast with his work in the 1980's.

After viewing the exhibition, the viewer is left with a feeling of puzzlement and fascination which might draw the skeptics one step closer to the world of abstract art.



Elmer Bischoff in black and white

Elmer Onry

Sliding for home hits grand slam

Interview by Matt Hays

Workshop West's new show is *Sliding for Home*, a musical-comedy by Frank Moher loosely based on baseball's history in Edmonton.

Resident designer Morris Erman says it was easy to come up with a set design for the Kaasa stage because "the theatre is shaped like a baseball field anyway. Really it was just a matter of putting a plate in the centre of the stage. It's one of the simplest ideas I've had in a long time."

Erman designs the set and the lighting for the show. He feels the role of the designer in the theatre is an important one. "You come up with a metaphor for a script. In this case it's fun. It's a visual expression of the show. The bottom line is the audience has got to be impressed with the way it looks. It must be interesting. A box set is a box set unless you find a way to make it interesting."

You get a feeling from line and colour. This play is not about real baseball in a real place. You can tell that by looking at the set it's obviously a theatrical version of baseball. Shape is real important in telling people what kind of show it is."

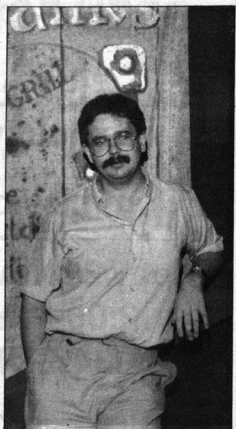
The set is geared to audience participation. Says Erman: "Without saying 'please participate,' this show makes you participate just due to all of the action around you. It's really a great script. The houselights come up

halfway through the show so you can buy peanuts and Cracker Jacks. Some audience members sit on 'cheap seats' on stage with other actors and hecklers."

Erman has designed sets across the country and is one of Edmonton's busiest designers. He also directs plays, and he teaches classes in speech and script analysis at King's College.

This is not the first time Erman has designed a play by Frank Moher. He designed *Odd Jobs* in Edmonton. The third time the play was staged in Canada, they proceeded to use Erman's set design without telling him. "Frank Moher phoned me up and told me they were using my design. Then he forced them to pay me royalties for it. I don't think they did it intentionally. So officially I've designed that show twice, unofficially three times."

Erman has worked in Edmonton for five years, enough time to see the Fringe Festival flourish. "The Fringe is great because it's a writer's vehicle," he says. "You have a chance to get it reviewed, to have an audience look at it, and for prospective buyers to look at it. A lot has come out of the Fringe. I wouldn't have said that three years ago — I guess I'm not a visionary. It's not really for designers though — the resources just aren't there. Still, it's great for writers and actors."



Resident designer Morris Erman gets a hit

Photo: Keith Ziskewitz