

# Women in WW II waiting for the parade

by Bruce Cookson

This weekend, the National Arts Centre Theatre Company is presenting *Waiting For The Parade* in SUB Theatre. The play, dealing with five women on the home-front during W. W. II, was written by John Murrell of Calgary in 1976. The current production is directed by David Hemblen.

This is the second year the theatre company has taken *Waiting For The Parade* across Canada, and actress Joan Orenstein has toured with it on both occasions. As this issue was going to press, I talked to her and publicity director Linda Oglov, shortly after they arrived on a flight from Toronto. Orenstein was tired from her trip, but was still a delight to interview. She spoke on a number of subjects pertaining to theatre and *Waiting for the Parade*; unfortunately time and space constraints permit only a small part of the interview to be printed.

**Gateway:** Could you give a synopsis of what *Waiting For The Parade* is about?

**Orenstein:** Well if you don't mind..., I think Murrell's own words are about the best you can have. (reads) "I took my cue from the memories of the dozens of western Canadians, both men and women, with whom I spoke while researching the play. Many of them remained, for one reason or another, in the vicinity of Calgary, throughout the six war years."

"To these people, a world war inevitably remained something very, very far away, difficult to understand, persistently intangible. Their greatest contribution to the war effort was on the "home-front", where they sought to sustain the basic qualities of everyday human life, until their fathers, husbands and sons could return to that life."

"This in itself, though humble, was a heroic contribution, and certainly the women of western Canada set the pace for this seldom told struggle."

So I mean, this is really what it's about...though we know that during the war, many women played a different kind of role, either in the forces or in industry, or on the land, the traditional role of women waiting - many who have not in any way been heralded, or spoken about with accolades - this was the general lot of women. Waiting, this is what it's about.

**Gateway:** What about Margaret, the character you play?

**Orenstein:** I'll tell you, but first let me tell you about the

characters in this play. The people in this play are not eccentric, and here I am quoting the director: "You must always remember that this play is about folks...they are ordinary people", and by ordinary it means the people that are unsung.

I have a feeling about the woman I play: she is a woman in her fifties who has two sons, a widow, a woman who has obviously not joined the work force, therefore has been with her family until it split from her. One son has gone into the army, and the other is drifting away from her in his own way, and is philosophically drifting away, and she is therefore thrown into the loneliness not only of a woman separated from her children, but of a woman in a war-time situation where the men are gone. She finds companionship in the voluntary work that she and the other four ladies in the cast enact in a "Red Triangle" meeting every week.

The humanity of this lady to me is that she is one of those women who live and die and are very anonymous in many ways; I mean to the general public, but to themselves of course they go through all the traumas...

**Gateway:** How has the play changed since it was first presented by the Alberta Theatre project in 1976?

**Orenstein:** Well I would not know because I haven't seen any of the productions, but I do understand there has been some re-writes. This production that we're doing now is a sister of the production that we did last year, but it's different because there are different personalities bringing themselves to the play, as always happens to any play, but especially to this one.

I feel quite privileged to have taken part in both productions and I find that what has happened to me is that it's deepened my own interpretation of Margaret...I found that she's strong enough that she can rebound off different characters in the play, and still retain her own integrity, which is a very enviable experience for an actress...You don't often get the chance to do a play immediately in tandem with a different cast, it's quite unusual.

**Gateway:** This is a question I've always wanted to ask. How many times do you act a play before you're sick of it, or does this happen?

**Orenstein:** Everynight you are re-creating a world, and as long as you can re-create that world you don't get sick of it, and that's part of your job as a performer. For myself, for example, this is the third time I've played Margaret and I've found it to be a fascinating experience.



A scene from *Waiting For The Parade*, L-R: Carole Galloway as Catherine, Nancy Kerr as Janet, Joan Orenstein as Margaret, and Karen Wood as Eve.

## W.O. one-man show

W.O. Mitchell, author, playwright and entertainer will hold a special benefit performance for Northern Light Theatre on Monday, September 24, 1979 in the Stage West Theatre at the Mayfield Inn.

The special one hour performance is appropriately entitled *W.O. Mitchell is a One-Man Show* and features monologues, comedy sketches and readings. Mitchell will also be on hand to chat and autograph his books during the evening.

Tickets for this event are \$30.00. There is only one performance and a limited number of seats are available. No tickets will be sold at the door. Doors open at 8:00 p.m., and curtain time is 8:45 p.m. Of the \$30.00 per person ticket price, \$25.00 is tax deductible as a donation to Northern Light Theatre and a receipt will be issued immediately upon purchase of tickets.

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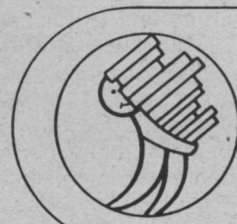
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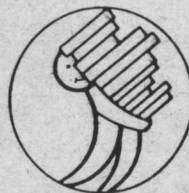
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