

Co-op theatre group encourages freelancers

interview by Paul Morigeau
Two Boards and a Passion is not a solid foundation for putting on a money-making theatrical production, but the co-op members of this company feel that it is solid enough to support interesting theatre. This co-op venture is performing Harold Pinter's *Betrayal* at the Chinook Theatre from March 19 to 21st, and from March 26 to 28th.

The co-op is comprised of Michael James (director), John B. Lowe, Maxwell T. Wilson (stage manager), Kate Newley, and Westin McMillan. The shoestring budgeted group was formed out of a mutual need for work and exposure.

According to James, the co-op was necessitated by the lack of theatrical job opportunities. James is a young director who recently graduated from the U of A's M.B.F.A. program. "There are few opportunities," says he, "for freelance work; thus a person has to make his own work." James claims that aside from the Fringe, unknown artists do not have a chance to gain exposure and therefore do not have an opportunity to get work with theatre companies.

Making work is just what this impoverished co-op is doing. The group members all invest equally, and share equally in any earnings. Lowe stated that once the advertising and the hall were paid for, the group was able to concentrate on the production. Through connections, Lowe was able to acquire free rehearsal time at the Walderdale Playhouse. The group was not able to afford rehearsal time at the Chinook.

Lowe and James have worked together in productions such as *Waiting for Godot* and in the 1985 production of *Blitzkrieg*. The co-op does not promise to be a challenge to the major theatres. James claims that the co-op format can offer alternative theatre throughout the year; not just during the Fringe.

James, like all of the member except Lowe, graduated from the U of A's fine arts program. He received his MBFA in April of 1986. Since then he has worked at Alberta Culture as a researcher. He says that the position is strictly a make-work project and he finds that finding freelance work is difficult without a prominent name.

According to the director, cutbacks at the Chinook and other major theatres have

negated any chance for mainline "art-for-art's-sake" theatre; the need to sell tickets supercedes the artistic considerations. James feels that a co-op movement can create an atmosphere that could fill this void. James hopes that the movement will snowball.

As a director, James feels that *Betrayal*

poses difficult questions. For one thing, the play does not follow normal chronological order. James says: "As a director I must strike a balance between artistic integrity and pleasing members of the audience who may not be able to follow the strange chronological order." The personable Lowe hum-

ourously suggests having Shumka dancers parade across the stage with placards, revealing the time frame for each new act.

Shumka dancers aside, Two Boards and a Passion offers an interesting approach to theatre for a price that does not exceed that of a movie.

Vanda and Lisa-Gay: Brassieres and hot wax made funny

The changing face of comedy

by Sherri Ritchie

It's refreshing to know there really are people who can make brassieres, cellulite, and hot wax treatments sound funny. Comediennes Vanda Michaels and Lisa-Gay Tremblay appeared at Yuk Yuk's Komedy Kabaret last weekend and were a very nice change for the Edmonton comedy scene.

It is rare to find female stand-up acts performing in Edmonton, or anywhere else in Canada for that matter. Michaels and Tremblay both estimated the number of prominent women on the Canadian comedy circuit to be a grand total of three. "That is absurd for one country," added Michaels. "I used to think it was logical since there are at least as many men as women, this ratio would be similar in comedy... wrong."

Tremblay was born and bred in Ottawa, and has been on the scene for two and a half years (only two months of that time have been full time). Michaels is an American with five and a half years of experience under her belt.

Neither woman has had any training in stand-up comedy. Michaels has studied theatre, while Tremblay went to school for business. "There is no real training for stand-up comedy," remarked Michaels. "There should be because there is such a boom in the industry now."

A logical assumption would be that since Michaels and Tremblay are so much the minority as far as gender, they would be

feminists. This is hardly the case. The point they made was the need for comedians to be able to laugh at anything, without barriers to keep them from making fun of everyday things. "In that sense I think it's kind of

refreshing that we're not ardent feminists," said Michaels. "In fact, one of the strengths of women is they'll put their insecurities out to show."

In comedy, the performers draw material very much from their own experiences. Michaels and Tremblay are not doing anything entirely different than the men as far as performance goes; they just have different material to draw from. "Male or female, funny is funny is funny is funny," explained Tremblay. "Women laugh at dick jokes too."

All of this isn't to say there is no difference between comedians and comediennes. Reactions to female stand-ups tend to be different. Last Friday the hecklers tended to shut their normally loud mouths when the women were on stage, whereas the Master of Ceremonies (a man) received the normal amount of abuse for a comic.

"We also don't get hit on like the men do," said Tremblay. "Most of them have groupies hanging around after the show. We rarely get approached."

Michaels concurred. "Men's reactions to me is usually AAAGGGHHHH!" she said. "It takes some aggression to be a stand-up comic, and aggressive women tend to scare men."

Although Michaels and Tremblay are not in comedy to promote the feminist cause, they can and have made changes to the face of comedy. "Comedy has been a real western, male, macho kind of art form," pointed out Michaels. "Women can soften it."



Comedienne Vanda Michaels: A classic line, "I fucked Bruce Willis!"

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