



Entertainment

Copithorne and Bizarre Comedy

by Elaine Ostry

"Comedy," says Marianne Copithorne gravely, "is not pretty." Nonetheless, she enjoys her work in *The Wedding Script*, a Theatre Network production which recently opened at the Kaasa Theatre.

The Wedding Script is a comedy of manners with "a lot of heart to it, and (in it) a lot of hearts get broken." Copithorne describes the play as "bittersweet" and "fast-moving." *The Wedding Script* certainly has its share of bizarre characters and events. The basic plot is that Louise (Marianne Copithorne) is a bored office girl who "wants to break out" of her lifestyle, which includes a dull, twelve year long liaison with Bob, a banker. She marries her friend's boyfriend, a British punk rocker, because he wants immigration status and his girlfriend eschews marriage. The play details the results of this choice and the reactions of the characters.

Copithorne could relate to Louise because she, too, was once an office girl. Copithorne entered theatre school to escape the humdrum of the office life, and graduated from the U of A's B.F.A. Drama program. She has been part of the theatre world for nine years. The B.F.A. program, says Copithorne, "gives you the skills to approach the practical world of theatre — but you really learn on the job."

Copithorne has acted in *The Tempest*, *Hay Fever*, and *As Is*. She acted in and co-wrote *Your Wildest Dreams*. She comments that "comedy, in some ways, is more difficult than tragedy... because it stems from real life. The characters must be real." Another important aspect of comedy, Copithorne adds, is precise timing.



Copithorne at the Kaasa.

photo Keith Zukowski

Copithorne is pleased with the production of *The Wedding Script*, commenting that it helps to have the playwright himself (Don Hannah) on the scene to add insights. This is the second production of *The Wedding Script* in Canada.

The preparation for the performance, Copithorne describes, begins with figuring

character so well that you instinctively block out your own self." Bob Barker, the director, coached them to improvising the story on state as a practice in working together and being aware of the climaxes of the story. Then the cast moves to the Kaasa Theatre to rehearse. Copithorne likes the three-sided theatre for its intimacy: "You're not acting in

a vacuum; the audience's right there."

Copithorne admits to suffering stage fright, but only on opening nights. The way to deal with this, she advises, is to "grab the other person's eyes and go with all the intent you have." "The last character introduced," concludes Copithorne, "is the audience... and you're doing it for them."

Not even sex can make this series a success

Amerika the Unbeautiful a Boring Mess

review and commentary by

Glenn St-Germain and Alex Shetsen

Welcome to the standard nightmare. The year is 1997, and the Russians have taken over. This is *Amerika*.

Actually, this was a fog. A miniseries of uncertain plot, uncertain characters, uncertain actors, and uncertain propaganda.

The Russians have been in *Amerika* since the late 1980's. It is never clearly explained how. Or why. One rumour had it that Seattle got nuked. Another said something about knocking out communications, so that the Russians could walk right in. How all this happened was as much of a mystery as most of the plot of the series.

The key character is Devin Milford (Kris Kristofferson), who had been the US President when the Soviets took over. At the start of the series, he is released from six years' political imprisonment, and sent to internal exile in Nebraska. (The USSR has Siberia, *Amerika* has Nebraska.) Anyway, the small community he is sent to just happens to be his home town, called — strangely enough — Milford, Nebraska.

Peter Bradford (Robert Ulrich), an old war buddy of Devin's, is a local politician who gets selected to be the governor-general of the Central Administrative Area, one of 15 that *Amerika* has been divided into. His deputy just happens to be Devin's ex-wife.

The Soviet in charge of the Central area is Col. Alexei Denisov (Sam Neill). Initially he is a robot, but his programming breaks down. Toward the end — strangely for a series where the Soviets are supposed to be the villains — he comes across as unusually human, and a bit of a wimp.

The plot is, to say the least, confusing. The Central Area is the first to secede from *Amerika* to form its own country, called Heartland. The Americans have had enough of being dominated and are beginning to think of revolution, especially now that Devin is out of prison.



14.5 hours of *Amerika* a sure cure for insomnia

Conditions in *Amerika* are horrible. People have to stand in line for food, phones don't work half the time . . . Just what one would expect in Soviet *Amerika*.

Most of what actually happened in the series was intrigue. Everybody was related to, conspiring with/against, and/or sleeping with somebody else in the series. It was almost as if we were watching the Russian version of *Dynasty*.

What *Amerika* was trying to tell us was lost in the fog. Apparently, the producers wanted to emphasize the fragility of American democracy and the ease with which complacent American values could defeat it. As 1988 presidential candidate Milford said,

"We must blame it on our breaking into a nation of groups, special interests . . . our failure as individuals to take responsibility for moral choice." And as Denisov tells Milford,

"You had political freedom but you lost your passion. You had become embarrassed . . . of feeling strongly about anything."

Unfortunately, this somewhat admirable, if not simplistic, message was totally lost. The situation as set up is pathetically unreal, not to mention unbelievable. Even if we accept the notion that the US has been taken over by the USSR, it is hard to imagine that there be anything left to take over.

Worse still, the plot looked as if it got stuck in the glue that was supposed to be holding it together. As we beheld scene after boring scene of sex, meaningless dialogue, sex, shameless overacting, sex, sentimental philosophizing, sex, flag-waving, and sex, we could not but begin to wonder if anything important had any chance of happening, not to mention how much time had passed since the beginning of Part I.

In a series that seemed to be nothing more than Red-bashing, the Reds being bashed were distinctly robotic, though their programming was incomplete. Nothing about the Soviets in *Amerika* was real. For a series whose background research was supposedly unsurpassed (58 books, 15 magazine articles, 5 films, and 18 consultants), they couldn't even get the accents right.

The Americans fared little better. The men were all dispirited, and the women all wanted nothing but sex.

When the fog occasionally lifted, the series made some obvious snipes at the Russians. A particularly poignant example was the Milford High School Marching Band solemnly playing the Soviet National Anthem during a parade, while Russian helicopters (looking suspiciously like Blue Thunder painted black) flew overhead in a show of strength. Other examples of Soviet atrocities occurred here and there, and in general the series espoused a narrow-minded, parochial, jingoistic, and xenophobic point of view. Worse, it was sentimental.

The overall effect, however, was weak. Despite all the flights of fancy, *Amerika* was about as interesting as watching bread mould. (And it had about the same taste.) This was a series that had no appeal for anybody. Leftists were shocked by the extreme right-wing message. The rednecks wondered where Rambo was. The average viewer switched to another network after a couple of episodes: the ratings after Part II were much lower than the network had anticipated.

In the end, all the fuss raised about *Amerika* by everybody was completely useless. It failed to live up to the expectations of both its boosters and its detractors. *Amerika* was 14.5 hours of garbage. People who are worried about its effects on international relations should have nothing to fear.

The Russians would be as bored and confused as we were.