

A WEDGE OF NIGHT

TUESDAY NIGHTS
AT EIGHT O'CLOCK.

YES: this is ARTS



By STEPHEN MILTON

Anyone with even a passing knowledge of daytime soaps is aware that a conversation that takes any real person 10 minutes to complete will take at least a week on TV. Spontaneity is about as welcome as marital fidelity on daytime dramas, obviously a tactic to keep bored students and housewives tuned for the entire week.

Fortunately, Lee's Palace has provided an escape from this video slavery in the form of *A Wedge of Night*, a weekly live soap opera that is not only funny but improvised. Each Tuesday night at 8 o'clock, the Midtown Cafe Theatre Society presents an hour-long episode of the continuing drama of the staff and lovers of RZTV, a fictitious television station. The soap is performed by a cast of 8 to 10 actors and actresses who are given a brief scene breakdown an hour before the show, and then let loose to improvise from there.

A Wedge takes the form of a series of 10 minute skits featuring up to five or six characters on stage at a time. At the beginning of the show, an announcer introduces each of the characters, providing background on their roles. Each of the actors portrays someone who is either on staff at the all-night television station RZTV, or is related to or sleeping with a staff member (usually the latter).

For someone walking in off the street with no foreknowledge of the show, it would be difficult to tell that it was being improvised. Frequently, the scenes appear to be roughly written, with the first two minutes being only slightly humorous, the

emphasis being placed on plot set-up. After the two minute mark, however, the dialogue starts to flow and the scenario begins to get distinctly more amusing as the tempo picks up, and the premise behind the characters' interactions becomes clear. The chief source of humour tends to derive from the fact that many of the characters have dual identities, and are usually sleeping with someone illicitly. The exposure of these duplicities is a frequently used device, giving rise to accusations of tramp, bitch and so forth. In addition to sleeping around, secret identities are used to protect the show's resident superhero, Jimbo, usually a mild-mannered wimp called James Stewart Jr.

Amongst the funniest characters is Coltene Trigger, played by Lisa Seward, a third year psychology student at York. Seward's character is RZTV's born-again aerobics instructor; a southern drawl and the loud mouth of Tammy Baker is wedded with the energy of a Jane Fonda on bennies. The result is often hysterical as Seward's character exposes the sleeping partners of the staff at RZTV, and is taken prisoner by her professional rival, talk-show host Isobel Harper, played by Sybille Forster. Seward's scenes are invariably the most vocal of all, with a high energy level that encourages the rest of the actors to become equally manic.

Seward is joined by another York student in *A Wedge*, Ron Hotz, who plays Phillippe. Hotz has been with the show for 6 weeks, one week longer than Seward. Hotz, like Seward is interested in psychology, although he is taking a double major in psychology and fine arts. Both

Hotz and Seward are taking classes in improvisation at Second City, and it was through this experience that they were able to audition for parts in *A Wedge*.

The soap has recently been attracting an increase in media attention, despite less than satisfactory attendance. Two weeks ago the CBC sent cameras to Lee's Palace during a Monday workshop to film the troupe in action. In addition, the show has been written up by some of the newspapers in the city.

The live soap has been on stage for forty weeks so far, although it arrived at Lee's Palace just six weeks ago. *A Wedge* is directed by Svetlana Zylina who used to be an owner of the Ritz Cafe where the soap got its start. "The problem with the Ritz was there were like, at most, 10 or 12 seats," says Zylina. The move to Lee's Palace was done in the hopes of expanding the soap's audience, which the cast wants to reach 100 people per show within four weeks. Zylina believes that this should be possible, based on the experience of similar improv-soaps in Vancouver and in Alberta.

In addition to being a good laugh for three dollars every Tuesday night (followed by a band), *A Wedge* has a lot to offer actors in the city. Because of its improvisational format, the soap does not take much time for the performers to prepare, yet it is great experience. The cast meets for an improv-workout on Monday afternoons, and then an hour before the show on Tuesdays. This leaves the rest of the week free for finding work. Another advantage to the show is that actors who do find steady work can easily be replaced. This happens quite frequently says Zylina, and at present the cast is looking for three more actors.

SMART MOVE



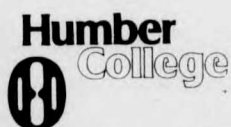
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Graduated from York University, Psychology, 1983
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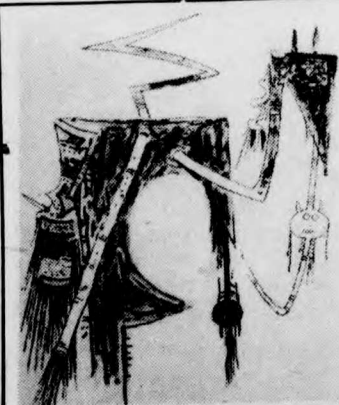


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