



Dan Redican, one of The Frantics.

## Toronto troupe's frenzied farce falls short

By JASON SHERMAN

The comedy group The Frantics (Paul Chato, Rick Green, Dan Redican, and Peter Wildman) presents yet another example of artistic director Guy Sprung's willingness to take on projects before they are ready to be produced.

In a pre-show interview, Wildman explained that the show was written and ready to go in two weeks. Granted the four are talented, but their show amounted to little more than a series of loosely connected skits so inconsistent that the audience was never completely hooked.

"The material," said Chato, "has a rhythm and if you can get the audience to follow your rhythm they'll eventually start laughing. It's a symbiotic relationship." One side, however, wasn't reciprocating.

Enough has been written elsewhere about The Frantics' background, and much more has been made of influences—or models, if preferred—such as Monty Python and The Marx Brothers. Being influenced and developing an original style is one thing, but coming across as imitative is another. At this stage The Frantics are somewhere between: a cantankerous puppet familiar to Muppet Show watchers; animations and puppetry highly derivative of Python; skits about small talk in elevators, admittance to Heaven, lecherous priests,

ruthless businessmen—we've seen these all too often.

The Frantics display comic ability when they are being original, a skit about people living inside walls is a good example. But it seems that time and again they have to rely up tried and true formulas to get tried and true responses. As Chato explained, "The whole idea of comedy is that you have to be funny to begin with and after that there's no harm in finding out what the rules are and learning them off by heart; every good writer has got to know the rules and all the techniques."

Yet the biggest laugh of the show came for a joke so cheap and clichéd as to make us wonder if technique does not destroy creativity: a man in a restaurant returns from the toilet believing he has defecated a piece of pie. He tells his disbelieving companion, "I'm telling you, I can make shit that looks like food." Companion replies: "So can McDonalds."

The Frantics do try to stay away from these one-liners for the duration of skits. But all too often they rely on punchlines for endings so that the skits come across as extensions of a stand-up comedy routine and all the character building is sacrificed for the sake of the big laugh.

At least Chato is aware of the difficulty: "If you deal with problems through characteriza-

tion, not specific jokes, if you deal with their feelings and the way they come to grips, that is more endearing—you can make far more jokes coming out of character." The most successful attempt at this involves a family of backstabbers, and is curious for its un-ending. There seems to be no middle ground.

The show tried running gags—perogies figured predominantly—in an overall structure in which the four were sleepwalking. The skits thus become dreams and, as in dreams, one thing leads to another. There is no need for conventional endings.

The show is at least rarely slow, thanks largely to its format, but also to Wildman's energy, which makes up for the more subtle performances. Dan Redican has the kind of comic talent that is similar to John Candy and John Belushi—requiring little output to get a large response. He has the show's highlight, a brilliant parody of a private eye film. It is his understatedness that paces the skit.

Perhaps much of the unsatisfactory feeling about the show comes from the medium. The group has been working mostly on radio, and a number of skits reflect their dependence upon non-visual humor. "What we do," solemnized Chato, "is the final arbiter of what we are." Even Wildman found that hard to take. The group is at Toronto Free Theatre until Feb. 12.

## New play focuses on Warhol culture

By STEPHANIE GROSS

When people think of Andy Warhol, the image of a Campbell's soup can is likely to come to mind, and he's likely to be dismissed as another crazy pop artist of the 1960s. Others will associate him with the bizarre movies he later made.

But for those who know about him and for those who don't, Sky Gilbert's play *Fuchsia Shock* entertainingly reveals Andy Warhol's world, and gives new images to the man whose art is fondly or critically recognized.

Gilbert bases *Fuchsia Shock* on the novel "Edie," named after a friend of Warhol who was a major actress in his films. Designer Diz Marsh has successfully created the silver and plastic stage which characterizes the "Old Factory" where Warhol and many other "hung out" and "tuned in."

All the characters are naturally rich with eccentricities, lifelike imitations of Warhol's trendy flock. In the centre of all the amphetamines, the sex, the anger, and raw emotion is Warhol: silent, seemingly insignificant, and scared.

The play is in two acts, the first taking place in the '60s and the second a decade later. Gilbert meets the challenge of keeping the characters consistent through a metamorphosis of time and consciousness.

Edie (York grad Siobhan McCormick) is dynamic—the Marilyn Monroe type, constantly putting herself on sexual display. She has an adolescent's disposition—disappointed and empty, looking for stimulation in a pill bottle, all the while flirting with death.

Sky Gilbert plays Ondine, a fun-loving homosexual who is innocently preoccupied with his high heels and pink shirts ("Do I look all right?").

One character, Billy Name, sticks to Warhol like a fly sticks to bug paper—forever capturing Warhol on the immortal celluloid. Billy is full of bitterness and decadent philosophies. His favorite place is the bathroom because there he feels like God—the God who "creates something beautiful and then shits all over it." Billy, like all of Warhol's followers, has a naive outlook which makes him feel ingenuous and special.

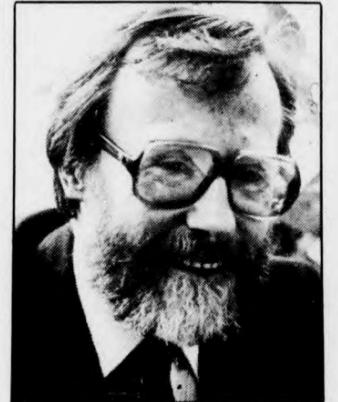
When Warhol asks "What is Sin?" there follows the answer: "Sin is to make someone feel totally free." And that is what Warhol, in the Old Factory, does.

Edie is free because she blames her disappointment on her father. Billy is free because he has given up. Paul America is free because he "takes things as they come."

But for all of Warhol's gang, the supposed God in the centre—Warhol—is the only one who seems to be far from free. He is the energy and centre of all the illusions. Warhol, wearing black-rimmed glasses and a conservative white shirt and tie, the opposite to the ostentatious group around him. They take his thoughtful aloofness and transform it into their own apathy.

*Fuchsia Shock* is a good effort, the acting is clean, the humor has energy and the timing is "right on."

*Fuchsia Shock* will be at the Theatre Centre, 666 King St., until Saturday. Tickets are \$5 tonight and tomorrow and \$6 on Saturday. Tickets can be bought at the Half-Price ticket booth in the Eaton Centre for \$3.50.



Even as you read this, this man, Frank Davey, is considering his choice for the best story in the *Excalibur*/Calumet short story contest. The results will be published next week close to this space.

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