



Dragos Ruiu

Late Blumer features U of A grads

interview by Teresa Pires

Charlie Chaplin once said, "When I was roaming the street trying to find enough to eat, even then I thought of myself as the greatest actor in the world." His words bring to mind the stereotype of a young actor: ambitious and creative yet desolate and unemployed.

Unlike Chaplin, Rebecca Starr and Kevin Hare have managed to find plenty of work since graduating from the U of A's BFA program in April of 1988. In fact, they are both appearing in *The Late Blumer* at the Nexus Theatre from February 8-25.

"It's terrifying," Hare explains. "I don't really know what I'm going to do after a job finishes."

Hare was last seen earlier this season as Pip in the Citadel Theatre's production of *Great Expectations* and last summer as Oberon in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at Mount Royal Summer Stage in Calgary. U of A students may also remember him as Leatherhead in *Bartholomew Fair* last spring at Studio Theatre.

According to Hare, getting a role involves three things: "talent, luck, and knowing people. Knowing people is extremely important — friends or people who know your work will encourage and hire you."

Starr, who was most recently involved in Catalyst Theatre's *Feeling Yes, Feeling No*, a children's play about teaching them to trust their feelings, also stressed the uncertainty of steady employment.

"It's hard being out the first year. Although there are some theatres that want to hire U of A grads, professional theatres have worked with professional actors and they know what these actors can do," explained Starr.

Starr's professional career includes performances in *Slim Gals Chow Down* with Teatro la Quindicina and Rough Theatre's

Born in the RSA.

"I was one of the last (of her graduating class) to find a job for the fall," continued Starr, "and around the time of the Fringe I was getting nervous, but everything worked out."

The change from acting as a student for a class to acting as a professional for a company was also demanding for the nouveau-acteurs.

"The most difficult thing is the rehearsal period. At school we had six weeks but for this play [*The Late Blumer*], we only had two," affirmed Hare. "In six weeks you can make several choices and discard

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them but in professional theatre, you don't have as much time to play with it (the play)."

Despite the difficulties that rookie actors often face, Starr and Hare appear to have made an effortless transition from students to professionals. At any rate, unlike Chaplin, they are far from roaming the streets for food.

The Late Blumer is described by Hare as being about "a guy who misses the 70's and makes the transition from the 60's to the 80's." Both Hare and Starr had to be briefed about the 60's by the other actors in the play who actually experienced the social upheaval of the time.

"If you're into the 60's you better be there!" concluded Hare.

Late Blumers?!?!

Kevin Hare and Rebecca Starr miss the 70s in Nexus Theatre's *The Late Blumer*.

Gravel Run for your money

Gravel Run
Theatre Network
through February 19

review by Ron Kuipers

Theatre Network claims that they are offering "comedy with a twist" in their current production, *Gravel Run*. This description is, to say the least, an understatement, because local playwright Conni Massing's *Gravel Run* could more accurately be described as twisted comedy than comedy with a twist.

The play revolves around the intricacies and psychology of small-town family life. But in order to keep the play from degenerating into the typical hum of the Canadian "wheat-play-syndrome," Massing has decided to make all her characters a tad crazy. These psychotic people contribute a great deal to the play's comedy, but at the same time they also make it hard to swallow.

Suspension of disbelief is demanded

here because the characters are almost too rich in their eccentricity for the audience to digest in one sitting. We are presented with a senile mama who has a poor, selective, and somewhat creative memory. She is married to the eccentric papa who thinks he can predict weather and other human events from examining jars of animal fat. Their son, Billy, is just a little unpredictable. Confront these three rural-bound zanies with their daughter, Leona, and fiance, Len, from the city, mix in a bit of incestual suggestion, and the audience is indeed presented comedy with a twist.

Now if the obstacle of disbelief is overcome, which just takes a little will power, then the play can offer moments that are simply gems. These moments are served up to the viewer as if he or she were leafing through a photo album. Each scene is closed with an interesting effect wherein the lights go down completely followed by a sudden flash. This flash creates the impression of a snapshot being taken, and is an effective

completion to each scene. Since each scene is ended in a humorous, ironic, or some other sort of climax, the snapshot effect nails each moment home in the viewer's consciousness.

Massing creates interesting little plays within the play. Two scenes in particular stand out. These are mock improv between Billy and Leona, and Mama and Len. Billy picks a melody on an out-of-tune guitar while he and Leona make up the lyrics. In the second scene, Len the anthropologist, who has become fascinated by the family life he never had, pretends to be Mama's son coming home from school. The only properties these scenes share is their improvisational spontaneity. But they are both a joy to watch, and are acted with impeccable timing.

The play also offers some humorous insights into the maternal-based structure of small-town family life. Mama, who definitely has at least one screw loose, is nonetheless able to persuade the family to do things her way. "Do it for mama"

becomes the family slogan. She maintains this control even as it leads the family down the road to inevitable chaos and unpredictable results. The ending in particular is beyond any form of divination.

But aside from several bright moments and some interesting effects, the play lacks some sort of connecting thread. The only performance that stands out is that of John Pyper-Ferguson, who plays Billy. The other performances are adequate to the task and have some high moments, but they lack continuity. The play also seems to drag at moments, and it is quite long. The revelation of family secrets is delayed to create suspense and interest, but perhaps is over-extended.

The play takes the audience on a *Gravel Run*, a drive through the countryside with a stop at every bar in sight, leaving them intoxicated with confusing comedy. But the bright moments, eccentric characters, lighting effects, and the most unexpected twist-ending are enough positive aspects to make the play worth seeing.