

# York grad student's *Starless* a product of Devine inspiration

By LOREN ARDUINI

It's not everyday that the York community has the opportunity to savor a piece of original art in the raw. But last Friday's Prime Time was an exception, as Michael Devine allowed the York community to witness a reading of his 11th and most recent play, *Starless*, now in its third revision.

The play has the rare trait of being able to operate on many levels, even in an informal reading. Through his play, Devine is able to stimulate the audience both visually, emotionally, and psychologically. He achieves this by packaging the play's main theme within a larger, more universal theme, thereby creating a play within a play.

*Starless* depicts the way different individuals interact when placed in an unusual situation. In many cases the outcome is funny and in others it

is touching. As the play progresses, it begins to reveal the emergence of relationships between the characters. *Starless* also incorporates descriptive imagery and is somewhat symmetrical in its beginning and ending.

However, Devine's control of the characters is somewhat overbearing. In some instances, the characters tend to be too predictable and stereotypical. Characters with names such as "Happy" and "Sad" are, not surprisingly, just that. Devine explains that the characters are ones that the audience can identify with, as they are universal.

This all takes place within a larger framework, with the addition of a narrator. The narrator has her own role and acts as an invisible, guiding hand who directs the inner play and forces things to happen unexpectedly. She also uses her dry wit as commentary on parts of the play and on the characters.

In one scene, the narrator speaks directly to the audience and tells them "not to get too comfortable in the seats that other dirty bums have occupied," because everyone was going to be moved to the opposite side of the stage for the second half of the play. In the meantime the actors behind her have switched their positions to opposite sides of the stage. When the narrator turns around and sees the change, she throws her hands up in despair and declares, "Well, how do you like that!" and storms off the stage.

*Starless* captures Devine's experience as a professional actor through its particular focus on movement; Devine's style of physicality, which he feels is lacking in Canadian theatre, is apparent.

The play will form part of the upcoming repertory season of the production company "Scheme of Things." Devine hopes to pursue acting and dramaturgy in the future.

Award-winning clichéd headline of the week: Barry Levinson's *Tin Men* proves . . .

## Sometimes you can go home again



**A MEETING OF MOUTHS:** BB (Richard Dreyfuss) confronts Tilley (Danny DeVito) after a collision of Cadillacs in Barry Levinson's *Tin Men*.

By KEVIN PASQUINO

At first glance the movie *Tin Men* has very little going for it. Set in Baltimore in 1963, the movie focuses on the lives of two aluminum siding salesmen. The fact that *Tin Men* takes these two factors and molds them into a terrific movie is that much more amazing.

Director Barry Levinson who made *Diner* a couple of years ago and then the lukewarm *Young Sherlock Holmes* and *The Natural*, returns to his old haunting grounds for this movie. Raised in Baltimore, Levinson captures the feel of the city without being overly nostalgic, and given today's trend for sentimental tributes to yesteryear, this lack of sugary nostalgia is somewhat of a blessing.

On a simplistic level *Tin Men* is the story of two salesmen who have a car accident and go out of their way to get revenge on one another, but Levinson takes a simple fender-bender and builds it into a rich study of both characters and their era.

In the one car is salesman Bill "BB" Babowsky (Richard Dreyfuss). He's single, well-dressed and doing quite well in the aluminum siding business. He's also bought himself a new Cadillac and when he rolls it out of the dealers he's as happy as can be.

In the other car is salesman Ernest Tilley (Danny DeVito). He's not well-dressed, has a sore neck, and is not doing particularly well in the world. He also has a wife (Barbara Hershey) who's on his back to do things like go on picnics and be a little romantic. Tilley is not a happy man.

When the two cars collide both BB and Tilley antagonize each other to

the point that anything could happen. "I'm gonna get this guy," vows BB. "Just for the fun of it."

Most writers/directors would have been satisfied with a cute tale of revenge: one guy kicks the lights out of his enemy's car, the other guy retaliates by smashing the windows, then he booby traps the other guy's car to fall apart, and on and on and on. Thankfully *Tin Men* avoids this *Revenge of the Nerds*-type storyline and digs into the lives of the two tin men.

It's little things in the film that make it click. Things like the discussions Tilley and his fellow salesmen have about Bonanza ("Pa's had three kids from different marriages. Why would anyone marry him? He's the kiss of death."), the way BB is known by all the salesmen for his amazing Maranga skills, and how everyone in a local bar not only looks as if they are living in the early '60s but as if they're lonely and horny and living in the 1960s. The film looks and feel realistic.

The background music, which includes songs by Nat King Cole and Frank Sinatra with additional pieces by Fine Young Cannibals, also adds

to the movie's appeal, but all of this would be trivial, were it not for the talents of Dreyfuss and DeVito.

Dreyfuss re-captures the old energy he had in *Duddy Kravitz* and *American Graffiti* and makes the smooth-talking BB a salesman to be reckoned with. DeVito's Tilley is much like the slimy characters he's portrayed for years, but Tilley is a full-blown character rather than the usual DeVito caricature. If anyone ever wondered about the difference between characters and caricatures, this film shows it.

Dreyfuss, DeVito and the majority of the supporting cast capture the essence of the door-to-door salesman: lazy, shifty and always looking for a quick, slightly unethical sale. Levinson neither praises nor buries these characters. He uses the salesmen as mirrors for society.

According to *Tin Men* things were not great in the 1960s but they were not miserable either, and Levinson captures the feeling of the era without exploiting it. One gets the feeling that this is the way things really were, and as the movie presents its entertaining story, it shows that things really haven't changed that much.

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