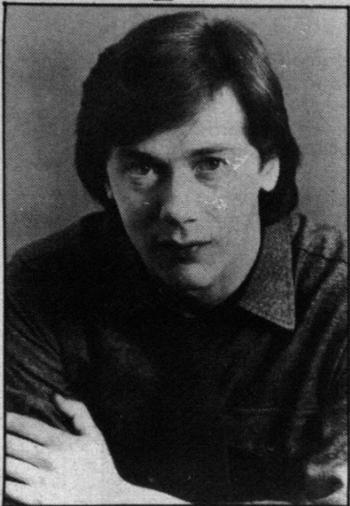


ENTERTAINMENT

Stephen Ouimette: on the move



Actor Stephen Ouimette

Since coming to Edmonton last fall, Stephen Ouimette has starred as a man and a woman in *Cloud 9* at the Phoenix Theatre, joined the Citadel acting troupe (currently playing Klaus Mann in *Mephisto*) and commissioned a play from Edmonton playwright and Fringe regular Stewart Lemoine. Ouimette also found time last freezing Friday to huddle in a set design room at the Citadel with two admiring Gateway reporters, Gilbert Bouchard and Suzette C. Chan.

What do you think of the theatre scene in Edmonton?

I think the theatre scene in Edmonton is really growing quite quickly. I was here two years ago and it was pretty exciting then, but now there's so much happening. There's at least seven or eight theatres that are really doing a lot of work and there's the Fringe. That's one thing that I'm working on right now: a midnight show that we're going to do next weekend (Feb. 14-17) with Teatro la Quindicina, which does a lot at the Fringe. We've been working on that a couple of

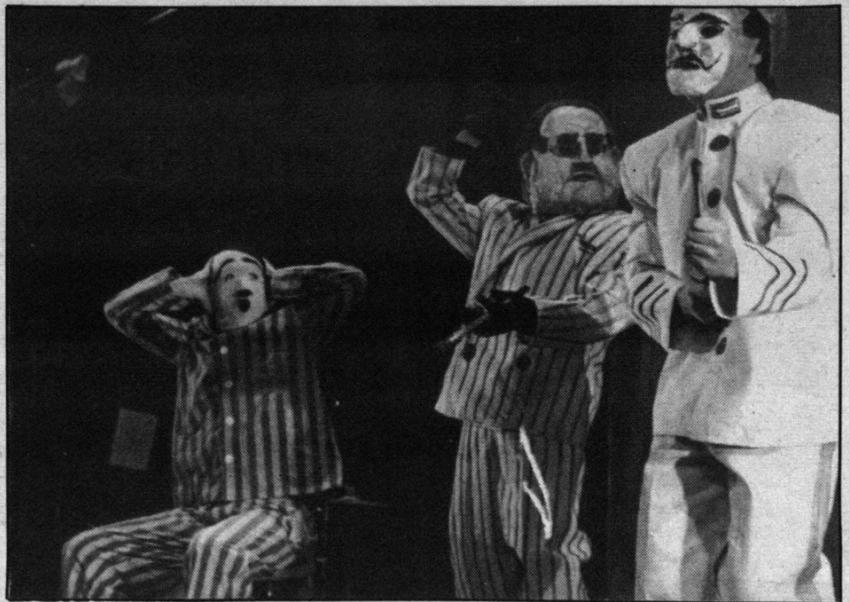
weeks now I think things like that are terribly exciting because the Fringe gets lots of people excited and out to see lots of risky stuff. That should be happening all year round.

Is it difficult adapting to other cities and other theatre companies?

Theatre's theatre. Even though this country is huge, the theatre community is small. Most of the people I'm working with here at the Citadel, and when I am working at the Phoenix, I've worked with before in Vancouver and Montreal, all over the country. So there's a little pocket of people that travel round. I don't think that as an actor you can afford to stay in one city. I don't think that you can just stay there and say "you have to give me work." I stayed in Toronto all summer and didn't get any work. I don't feel that they owe me a job. I have to dig up what I can.

In *Cloud 9* at the Phoenix, you played a woman in the first act and a man in the second act. Was that a difficult role to get into?

I didn't really find it that difficult because it was the second time I'd done the play. I did the play in Montreal in the spring. So any major things we went through, discoveries and things, I had that much of a jump. But it was just lots of fun because of what the play is about — and it's about a lot of things — it's personal liberation. It was, became a lot fun. It just became lots and lots of fun to break down all my preconceptions, especially about women to actually play a woman. I didn't want to be a wimp. But part of the statement that Carol Churchill (the author of *Cloud 9*) was making is that women in that period (Victorian England) were really oppressed and forced into a subservient position. So you had to show that and give the character, Betty, some dignity all at the same time, so that was a bit tricky. You also feel that you're exposing too much of yourself. But I think that's the beauty of the play. The actors have to expose themselves. If you're holding



Stephen Ouimette (far left) plays a pantomime Hitler in the Citadel Shoctor production of *Mephisto*.

anything back and winking at the audience, it just doesn't work. It becomes sort of cheap.

Do you see yourself doing more work in movies, maybe acting in some?

Yes, that was the whole idea behind getting this grant (from the Canada Council) I had this idea for a script since university and I had this thing lying around for eight years and always thought this would make a great short film. I thought "why don't I see if I can just do it?" so I got a grant application together — which is a lot of work — and out of about 265 applications, they picked 35, of which I was one, so that was great. This particular grant, the "Explorations" grant, is for people in one medium who want to branch out into another.

Could you explain the film you're making?

It's a black and white silent film for two characters, a man and a woman, living together. It's slightly abstract, and hopefully it will be a comedy, in the style of the old silent films.

What kind of characters do you like to play?

I like playing people with a real strong sense of purpose or a real clear line. It's easy to say that everyone wants to play a psychotic, but hopefully the character will have something to say on a bigger scale about something important — love, or things that affect us — somebody who is excited about their life. I don't think anybody wants to watch a loser. People want to watch fighters. People in an impossible situation but who don't give up.

Is there a particular theatre you like to work

at or that you get a certain feel for?

Certainly the Phoenix. I always feel good about working there. I like the people who run it; it's a theatre with real heart, even though they're small.

Would you like to do some TV?

Eventually. It's just that I've been so busy. I literally haven't stopped working since I got out of school.

What attracts you to the theatre?

I like to work in a company. That's why I came to the Citadel I like the idea of a company. I like working with the same people over three or four shows in a season because then you get to know people, you get to know how they work. And better work comes out of that, I think.

Have you thought of working in the States or in Europe?

I don't know. People in this country jokingly say, "my career, my career." I don't think you can have a career (as an actor). I think you can just go from job to job. We like to think we have stars, but I don't think we have any. I think we have Juliette and Pierre Burton and Wayne and Shuster and Wayne Gretzky. Those are stars, but there are no Canadian theatre stars because even the people who are known in the east aren't known in the west and vice-versa. So if you're after stardom and an international profile, then go to England, go the States; you're just not going to get that here. But you can make a living and do your work.

Characters doing not just thinking

interview by Gilbert Bouchard

Stewart Lemoine doesn't like setting his plays in the present. "When you set your play in the present people expect you to make a grand statement about life and existence," said Lemoine. "You are excused from all of that if you set your plays in the past."

Unsurprisingly, Lemoine's latest play *Women in Bed* is set in 1964. The play; produced by Lemoine's own theatre company, Teatro La Quindicina, and starring Stephen Ouimette, is being presented this Thursday, Friday and Saturday midnight in the Phoenix Theatre's downtown space above the Bistro Praha on Rice Howard way.

"*Women in Bed* is about a bed salesman in a department store and a series of women who come through his department," said Lemoine. "All the women are contrasted, and are extraordinary in several ways."

Lemoine did research on beds and mattresses to write the play and eventually took the slogans and advertisement right off the beds "and straight into the mouths of my characters."

"What my play does is take and combine advertisements, filling in the details," said Lemoine.

Lemoine is trying to capture the ideal world advertisers are trying to sell. "I always wonder what life would be like if it was like the ideal that is projected."



Author Stewart Lemoine.

Lemoine is also tired of plays that are long on introspection and short on action. "So many plays just have the people sitting there talking about their lives. I'm tired of that. I want to see people doing something. I've just dropped that aspect (people talking, not doing) in my plays."

His characters don't just sit around talking about getting their lives in order, they do something about it.

Lemoine has had five plays performed including "Dinah's Wine Bar", a hit at last year's Fringe Festival.

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