

entertainment

Neil Munro is a virtuoso in Spratt

By Hugh Westrup

And you think you have troubles. Consider Jack Spratt, the travelling salesman, who in one day is fired from his job, discovers his wife has cancer and is charged with the rape of a mentally retarded girl.

Not that Jack isn't the type of person you wouldn't wish misfortune on. He is loud, aggressive and foulmouthed, always on the assault with a sales pitch, a slap on the back and a dirty joke. The women he encounters are "chicks", "broads" and "pieces of ass". Spratt is a belligerent boor hustling for success but destined to remain in the lower echelons of the business world.

Vancouver playwright Joe Wiesenfeld has chosen Spratt to be the unlikely focus of his new play. Wiesenfeld is a former reporter for the *Winnipeg Tribune*, who moved on to writing for the screen and then the stage. Structurally, *Spratt*, the first Wiesenfeld play to be performed on stage, betrays his background in film. The individual scenes are brief but pointed and jump from office to home to bar to bookie joint to prison cell. On stage this cinematic movement has been handled by spotlighting each scene

in a different area of the stage. Director Jack Blum keeps the story flowing by placing the actors so that a gentle turn at the end of each scene places them immediately into position for the following one.

The major achievement of the Toronto presentation of *Spratt* is the male acting. Lubomir Mykytiuk as the lawyer friend and John McAndrew and Paul-Emile Frappier in multiple roles as authority figures are outstanding. In the lead role, Neil Munro swaggers and swears with a wolfish grin. It is a part that might be easily caricatured but Munro develops the elusive undertones to reveal a desperately confused man aching for approval. Even when the melodramatic structure begins to creak and groan Munro keeps us believing in this hapless figure. It is a virtuoso performance.

If only the female characterizations were half as good. Barbara Gordon as Dorris, the frightened housewife, creates no impression of having lived with Spratt for 15 years. Aside from her nervous, plaintive voice, Dorrie is a void. Angie Gei's blissed-out portrayal of Marlie is a gross misrepresentation of mental



retardation. Not that Gei is helped at all by Wiesenfeld's lines which are sometimes symptomatic of lyrical feeble-mindedness. Marlie spouts pseudo-poetic fantasies about dancing, flying and starry ceilings and in the climatic description of the encounter with Spratt calls him an eagle who has built a nest in her heart. Wiesenfeld's fanciful idea seems to be that the flighty

imaginings of the mentally retarded free them from the imprisoned existences of people like Spratt.

Midway through the play, with the prospect of a jail term before him, Spratt exclaims, "I've blown my life!" *Spratt* is billed and designed as a play about male liberation. Jack Spratt is a male chauvinist of the worst kind but his

problems are due to more than his insensitivity toward women or entrapment within a stereotyped sex role. He is a loser at everything but the root of his inadequacy never receives appropriate thematic exploration.

Despite the missing links, *Spratt* is a compelling show throughout. It is on view at the Tarragon Theatre until the end of the month.

The Happy Cooker

By Denise Beattie



Crabby Betty

The last recipe! It seems incredible! I won't document my weight gain over the year I've appointed myself your indulgence advisor.

To be true to my general theme this year, I should go out with a student newspaper oriented, plebian-style recipe. However, I know of a patrician extravaganza that certainly belongs in your files if not on Tuesday night's supper table. Actually boasting more exotic ingredients than carrots, celery and ground beef, it won't rival sloppy joes for a quick, cheap supper but neither is it the ultimate gold digger.

Crabby Betty is the elegant name of this dish. It's my mother's creation and her name is Betty. For a personal touch begin with Crabby and include yourself.

Gather: to feed 8, 1/2 for 4, etc.

6 cloves garlic

6 Tbsp. butter

6 green onions, chopped (including tops)

1 1/2 to 2 lbs. raw, small shrimp, cleaned (this is an easier requirement in North Carolina where my family is) 3 6 oz. packages frozen Snow crab, thawed and drained (save juices)

1 tsp. salt

1/2 pint heavy cream

1/4 cup Sherry

cooked rice

4 Tbsp. butter

1 1/2 cups crunchy Chinese noodles (look in the "Chinese" section of your local food place)

Procedure:

Over low heat, melt the 6 Tbsp. butter. Slowly sauté the garlic until brown and then discard the garlic. Stir in the onions for one minute.

Add the shrimp, stirring frequently and cook over slightly higher heat for 5-7 minutes, until the shrimp is pink and cooked. Add the crab, stirring frequently but gently until the crab is hot and glazed with mixture.

Next stir in the crab juices. Add the cream, parsley, salt and Sherry. Stir gently and let the mixture get hot without boiling. Check taste for salt.

Serve on a bed of rice topped with Chinese noodles that have been sautéed in the 4 Tbsp. butter until hot, crispy and delicious.

Impressive, eh? It certainly makes the fish and chips I've been contemplating for dinner sound meagre.

Hmmm. I guess I have to admit I'm finished. If any hedonistic soul out there would like to be a happy cooker next year, stop by *Excalibur* offices, room 111, Central Square. and thank you Ms. Visser!

Hi Mom, hi Leigh, hi... ahem.

Forget Rabbit Test

By Michelina Trigiani

Rabbit Test, currently playing at the Imperial Six theatre, is "the story of the world's first pregnant man." An off-beat comedy directed by Joan Rivers and written by Rivers and Jay Redack, the movie is an affront to the audience's sense of humour and pocketbook. It is preposterously deficient; boastfully second rate.

Its inferiority as a product lies not in its array of talent. The four major roles are portrayed skillfully by Billy Crystal as the sheepish protagonist Lionel Carpenter, Joan Prather as his gypsy girlfriend Segoynia, and veterans Alex Rocco and Doris Roberts as macho buddy and over-protective mother.

In addition, many participants of the TV game show, *Hollywood Squares*, display their abilities in a wide variety of character parts. Most notable are the performances of George Gobel as the president of the U.S., Paul Lynde as Lionel's doctor, Sheree North as the father of his child and Peter Marshall as himself. In fact, except for a cameo by Ms. Rivers, the cast is perhaps the film's only laudable attribute.

Rabbit Test is unsatisfactory due to its lack of cohesion and its grade of humour. Described by Rivers as "totally outrageous and insane" the movie is full of gags with no apparent direction or focus and this comic twitching cannot be explained away as the director's genius.

Arriving at the film's theme is impossible because it does not possess one. The first few scenes may make us think that the movie is



a spoof of the sexual stereotyping found in today's society. The inept Lionel tries to seduce an inflatable doll in his apartment, he gives up his seat on a bus to a gorgeous blonde only to find her offering it to her muscular boyfriend, an octogenarian reveals her withering body to male passerbys and the scene in which Lionel is impregnated is not your usual "loss-of-virginity" tableau. "It was my fault," he is to say later, "because I let her get on top."

But what could have been an interesting twist to a movie directed by a woman, especially in this year of female films, is sacrificed in

favour of tasteless skits satirizing scattered aspects of life.

Topping the list of Rivers's tactless humour is the film's ending. On Christmas Eve, in a cabin under a blanket of snow, Lionel's baby is born. Bells ring *Hark the Herald* while three mock wisemen march in silence in the winter night. A baby's cry is heard, the camera focuses on a shining star in the sky and a deep, omnipotent voice thunders, "Oh my God, it's a girl."

In the context of the movie, where the sexual roles are often reversed, where many women occupy a position of superiority and where the male is seen as submissive through the character of Lionel, this line becomes meaningless. It is this kind of dilapidated irony which insults the intelligent audience. Please, please, do not go and see this movie.

At ROM

York student and *Excalibur* contributing editor Agnes Kruchio was a member of an archaeological exhibition to Iran, which in 1971 discovered burial chambers that predated Islam. They had been looted centuries ago by grave robbers, and then apparently used as a storage area by later inhabitants. An exhibit, now at the Royal Ontario Museum, shows some of the artifacts recovered from the site. April 11 to the end of summer.

Cabaret needs some class

By Colin Smith

The final offering of York Cabaret, *A Touch of Class*, was, to say the most, uneven. Unlike most of the other cabarets, which steadfastly stuck to the middle ground, this one had trouble even finding it. When it was working, which wasn't often, it was as sprightly as champagne, and when it wasn't it was like flat pop.

The problem was easily located. The cabaret, which was about 50 per cent song-and-dance and 50 per cent comedy blackouts, offered up some of the most tightly choreographed dancing (credit to choreographer

Jacques Lorenzo) seen this year, along with some of the most dismal comedy. This kept the revue perpetually off-balance.

Technically the cabaret was impressive. The set was extravagant and the wardrobe rich. The eight-member cast were enthusiastic, and were backed up by able musical support.

But most of the energy was realized on material that badly needed realizing itself. The wretched comedy intervals often had momentum and promise, up to the delivery of the punch lines, almost

all of which fell flat. The dealer sketch, the doll sketch, the scene in the restaurant, all shared this. The lack of comedic pacing did much to mar this cabaret.

Good moments should be noted. Integrated comedy and music was achieved in two skits; a disco take-off of Cinderella and a musical mockery of Diana Ross and the Supremes, both of which leaned on the multi-faceted talent of Jacques Lorenzo (alias John Revolta.) The firing squad blackout escaped a hard landing, mostly through surprise and sheer cheek. Suzanne Bennett stopped the show with a

beautiful rendering of *The Way We Were*. Alix Chochinov, Charlotte Moore and Bennett had an amazing display of fast and furious footwork. In fact, all cast members should be lauded for their dancing contributions, seeing as how the stage was slanted.

Still, it wasn't enough. Bits and pieces don't make a whole ... ad infinitum. The cabaret couldn't pull itself together enough to lend enough distinction to its assets in order to overcome its liabilities. In the end, what it needed was a little more class.