

Theatre

# Wingfield Farm a winner

Letter from Wingfield Farm  
Northern Light Theatre  
Run ends March 6

review by Moreen Murray

**T**he editor of the local newspaper delivers some unusual guidance at the beginning of this play: "The best advice I could give about running a weekly paper is to avoid unsolicited contributions." A peculiar attitude indeed when one considers that it is the unsolicited letters posted from Wingfield farm that provide the folksy and utterly endearing basis of the play.

For anyone who has grown up on, visited relatives at or at least spent some time near any rural community, the language and situations — not to mention the particular characteristics — of country residents will surely strike a familiar chord.

You see, Walt Wingfield, former chairman of the Board of McFeeters, Bartledge and Hendry, has struck upon the fashionable notion that he would like to escape the "rat race" and become a "gentleman farmer." He'd like to be considered something of a modern Thoreau. He happens to settle upon Persephone township which, "... has the climate of — Churchill, Manitoba... Gone was the three piece suit and in its place the after-dawn look by Co-op."

As much as Walt tries to change his surroundings, he still cannot abandon his business attitude — either in the running of his farm or in his correspondence to the local paper. "Fail to plan and plan to fail," is one of his mottos. He is a man who believes in setting weekly objectives.

Not wishing to be an island unto himself, Walt sets about and describes his encounters with the neighbours, a somewhat guarded and bemused lot — particularly at Walt's

naivete in thinking he can run a modern farm, alone, without machinery...

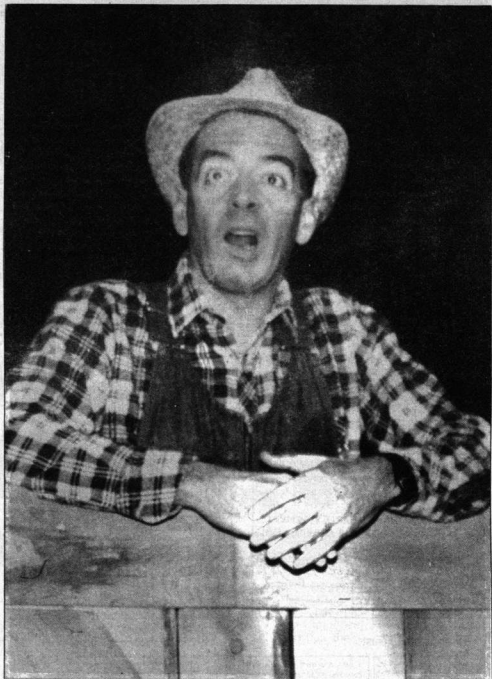
Freddie, his first encounter, is a wide-eyed neighbour, who speaks much like Porky Pig. Freddie is kind of a jack-of-all trades — auto repairs, real estate, auctions — none of which he does very well. "I think they call it mixed farming," observes Walt. Freddie frequently auctions off his own equipment, which through neglect has not been returned to him. He is frequently accompanied by his two nephews, who laugh like "guinea hens."

Walt also consults "the squire", a crusty local eccentric, and Don, a dairy farmer who speaks in brief, Gary Cooper-like phrases. Through many trials and tribulations (hilarious as they may be), Walt is eventually settled into the community — on his own terms.

**Rod Beattie** is a marvelous solo performer who makes one forget, at times, that there is no one else on the stage. He takes on this variety of roles with ease, and his subtle shifts in voice and mannerisms are smooth and assured. He delivers the anecdotes with perfect timing and allows them to unfold in a charming, gentle way that is neither hackneyed nor

Beattie's characterization of Walt, the befuddled gentleman farmer/narrator is both detachedly businesslike and warmly, ineptly human.

Letter from Wingfield Farm is a most enjoyable human comedy because while we are laughing at Walt's foibles and those of his friends, we are also laughing at ourselves. As much as Walter contends with his new life, there is a certain satisfaction gained in trying something for the sake of trying, appreciating a simple sunset in an orchard and being able to realize that a sense of humour puts things into perspective in an increasingly complex world.



Rod Beattie "is a marvelous solo performer."

photo Bruce Gardner

# Play draws political Map of the World

A Map of the World  
Walterdale Theatre  
Run ends February 28

review by Elaine Osty

**C**an a UNESCO conference on poverty in Bombay be ruined by a flighty American actress?

This is one of the many questions posed by the Walterdale's production of *A Map of the World* by David Hare. Hare is touted as "the most prominent of a second wave of Britain's Angry Young Men." (The first wave featured John Osborne, *Look Back in Anger*.) He is best known for the play *Penry*, which was made into a film starring Meryl Streep.

"Your principles  
can be bought at  
the corner store."

Hare is left-wing, and it shows. To his credit, however, he shows the value of right-wing views as well as his own, and points out some of the distasteful tendencies of leftists. The result is a play that challenges the audience with a forum of political attitudes.

The play centers on the political debate between a young, idealistic socialist journalist, and an older, cynical, conservative novelist at a conference on poverty in India. But although this confrontation dominates the play, *A Map of the World* manages to avoid the tedium of argument with an interesting framing plot.

Yes, *A Map of the World* is really a play within a play — rather, a play within a film. It really is about a film being made from a novel written about the conference — by the right-wing novelist himself. The novelist, Mehta, even appears at the film's shooting

criticize the director's interpretation of the events.

The humour of the play also derives from the love interest, the promiscuous Peggy, an actress. She adds an element of farce to the play. Both the novelist and the journalist are in lust with her. Through various machinations in the plot, they agree to hold a formal debate — and the one who presents the most convincing argument wins the girl.

If the novelist wins, he will be allowed to speak at the conference without the conditions which the journalist, among others, wants to impose upon him.

*A Map of the World* features a very strong cast, remarkable for the sincerity of their performances. **David Russell** as the idealistic journalist Stephen attacks the conservative views of Mehta with great vigour. Some of his lines are embarrassingly sentimental ("I came to this conference... as a 27 year old boy, and I have the feeling I will leave as a man"), but his sincerity overcomes this sweetness.

**Tom Mencil** was suave as Mehta, flashing his gold ring and custom-tailored suit. Stephen claims that Mehta's main character traits are "superiority and hopelessness." Mencil reveals these qualities effectively.

Peggy is a valuing character: she has no political opinions and is very callous towards those people who do. "Your principles can be bought at the corner store," she tells Stephen. **Lynda Adams** plays this character, who makes everyone wince, with a nudge and a wink.

The supporting cast is equally interesting. **Kloeyne Rodney** as Elaine, the reporter, is sophisticated as the only cool-headed character. She didn't have many lines, but she listened well — the mark of good acting. Her facial expressions when Peggy kept saying "Elaine will understand." "Elaine would agree," were hilarious.

**Avril Limatainen** also portrays his character with cool humour. This Dave Billington look-alike shows Angels as the consummate film director juggling egos. His costume was

perfectly hip, featuring a hip red scarf and bright blue loafers.

**Colin Park** does a marvelous turn as Martinson, the prim diplomat who is very concerned that the larger issues are being forgotten because of the sexual battle. "To the bigger issues, please!" he hisses at the rest.

In one scene, talk among the actors of novelist E.M. Forster's homosexual relationship with a policeman leads Martinson to say that we are all gay at heart, and repressing these instincts will cause heterosexuals "to implode." Parks shows Martinson's earnestness — and embarrassment when everyone laughs — very well. "If you saw those movies with the little fishes," he says, "you'd understand."

Such lines are sprinkled throughout the play. On the whole, the dialogue is lively. Politics permeate the play — the actors can't avoid them even on a break. For example, when Martinson, doing a crossword puzzle, asks "What starts with a Z," has seven letters

and is 'the plague of the earth?'" Elaine's answer of "Zionism" provokes a political argument.

Too much of the play, however, consists of long monologues. But the actors are so sincere that they transcend the occasionally tedious rhetoric of the text. An example of this is **Selwyn Jacob's** eloquent performance as Mr. M Bengue from Senegal.

It is hard to imagine that none of these actors are very experienced. The only sign of their inexperience was some nervousness at the beginning of the play.

The director, **Peter Campbell**, must be credited for eliciting polished and sincere performances and good ensemble acting from the cast.

In all, *A Map of the World* presents challenging political issues in a variety of perspectives — and a touch of humour.

**HELD OVER**  
Phoenix Theatre's  
Nack-breaking Car-Hop  
Swiss Pajamas  
Until Sunday

# Art contest for students

by Elaine Osty

**C**reators of miniatures will have the chance to show their talents in a provincial art competition. New artists will receive recognition throughout Alberta in several galleries.

The competition is designed for art students.

"We want to do something for the student," says Roberta Shaw of First Impressions, which will host the event. "A lot of artwork is from students, and it is simply fantastic, so we'd like people to be aware of this."

First Impressions will select some artists and ask them to make 100 similar pieces. The pieces will be framed and marketed, with, as Shaw says "with emphasis placed on artistic exposure." The pieces will be on sale from June to September, and all unsold material

will be returned.

"We'll be doing some fairly unique framing," says Shaw. "It is a unique way for people to see their work."

All types of media are acceptable, including sculpture, weaving, and jewelry. The piece simply has to be a miniature, not greater than three square inches.

"(The artists) are going to get a good idea of how to work with people, and they'll also get comments. It's a fabulous way to get some exposure."

The deadline for the competition is March 15. Competitors are invited to send their work to First Impressions, 5917 - 1A St., Calgary, AB T2A 0G4. Include your name, address, phone number, and biographical information.