

Gagnon: unique musical genius

by Gretchen Pohkamp

Reviewer: "Can you get me tickets to review André Gagnon?"

Editor: "Yeah, I suppose so... who is this guy anyway?"

Reviewer: "He's great! He plays the piano and has a 10 musician back-up band. He's Canada's answer to Beethoven, the Village People, Benny

Goodman, and Paul McCartney all rolled into one."

Editor: "He must be some performer!"

And that he is. Halifax audiences are known to be somewhat overzealous in their praise of visiting performers, leaping to their feet whenever even vaguely impressed. But on Thursday night I felt the en-

thusiasm was genuine and well deserved.

The stage was set. Musicians dressed in black took their seats, one flute, a string section, two guitars, drums, percussion and a synthesizer. Now only the position in front of the grand piano remained unoccupied.

Out sauntered a tiny man,

casually dressed in mauve coloured jeans with matching sneakers and a white shirt. He looked like part of the stage crew. But Haligonians knew André Gagnon and bid him welcome.

Gagnon played a variety of new compositions which the crowd appreciated for the genius involved in their creation. But the greatest satisfaction came when Gagnon played pieces from his album Neiges and St. Laurent.

It was a personal journey from climaxes, happy high points, to pensive, tranquil moments. He has the ability to express himself with music as few can with words.

Between pieces he spoke

with the audience in both French and English. "I learned my English from Carol Burnett," he said. "I loved to watch her show and wanted to understand what she was saying. Now I'm only missing the accent."

He is a nymph, dancing and moving with the music, generating enough electricity to hold his orchestra on the edge of excellence, while at the same time zapping the audience.

His original style of music makes him unique. Lovers of disco, jazz, rock, classics and folk music will all find Gagnon's genius enticing. He promised to come back next fall for two performances. I'll be there for both of them.

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Back to Berlin

by Glenn Walton

Berlin, more than any other Old World city, has been the subject, or at least the backdrop, of many of our more sordid cultural fantasies. Paris and Rome claim art and opera, London still retains imperial pretenses, but Berlin, despite its Fredericks have provided our imaginations with decadence and its apocalyptic aftermath. The lively city of the 20's, which harboured such great artists as Bertolt Brecht, Kurt Weill and Kathe Kollwitz, gave the world the cabaret, which in the video age, seems a dying form. Now we have Seaweed Theatre's *Back to Berlin* to remind us of a period and an attitude to life far removed from the homogenized versions we have been served in such films as *Cabaret*.

Political cabaret like *Berlin* itself, is an odd bird: neither drama nor strict lecture, it has bits of both. It sings, but only so, and sometimes it dances, but it need not be graceful. Virtuosity is not its forte, and aesthetic series please leave at the door when you come to view. But be careful; this bird is rambunctious and can even bite, but so (such is its charm) that you don't really mind.

Back to Berlin, by Sandy Moore has, in its new version, (just produced at Neptune as part of the Joseph Howe Festival), been clipped to one pithy act. It is better than the original show at Stages, depending on the talents of the two semi-professional performers (Moore himself, as the weasley emcee Piano, and Helen Goodwin as the sexily deadpan Lola-Lola, the naughtiest girl in Berlin). The new show re-

tains most of the good lines and better songs of the original. It has Moore's opening number with its clever associations with the music of 20's Berlin (after the war everyone waited for the German revolution Piano tells us slyly, 'but due to bad weather, it took place in music.') Here also in the Pumpernickel sketch (woman rushes to the baker to buy a loaf whose price varies, in an ever more crazily inflationary spiral, according to the year, month, day, hour...) and Goodwin's excellent rendition of "Lili Marlene" sung in a gutsy vibrato that had me shivering with nostalgia for an era I never knew. Moore has an easy stage presence and his Piano is appropriately insinuating. Goodwin, while she strides from pose to pose, has an odd spoiled sexiness about her that like Berlin, is never cute. Both performers need to work on their German accents, and it became irritating to hear the city's name continually mispronounced whenever the text was German, but these are minor quibbles. Musically and otherwise they made a good team, well attuned to the other's timing, which is so essential in cabaret.

The writing of *Back to Berlin* is for the most part sharp and topical, betraying an awareness of the social and political issues touched on, but wisely avoiding becoming a tract, preferring, as good cabaret should, to wink before the next snap of the whip. *Back to Berlin* hits the mark well and often enough to make us hope that it will be received sometime soon.

