

Theatre director remembers

A paean to two years at the PEAK

I do not regret this journey. We took risks; we knew we took them; things have come out against us. Therefore, we have no cause for complaint.

Robert Falcon Scott,
Last Journal

By JOHN JULIANI

What is at stake in the ill-advised way in which PEAK has been discontinued? Perhaps nothing less than the future of fine arts education in Canada. We set out to create the model of a programme that was unique — that did not merely follow the pattern established by graduate programmes in the United States. This, PEAK has done.

With very few modifications, this programme, as it has been articulated since September, 1974 and as it will continue to be articulated through August, 1976, could form the basis of an exciting, viable and unique graduate level programme in theatre in any North American university.

For that matter, PEAK has already demonstrated that the philosophical thrust of its research, as well as the practical, public manifestations of its theatrical technique, have been validated in less than 15 months by established theatrical and para-theatrical organizations both at home and abroad.

For those of you who may be wondering about that philosophical "thrust", let me tell you there is nothing in PEAK that does not "belong" at a university — especially if that university is York University, and boasts a motto that reads Tentanda Via (The way must be tried). Can there be a truer testament to this ideal of experimentation and tenacity than what PEAK, with patience, perseverance and at least some provocation, has attempted and continues to attempt?

In the last five weeks I have expressed the opinion that the PEAK experiment has been and continues to be assessed in a hasty, inadequate, unqualified and intellectually dishonest manner. This accusation, levelled at the dean of fine arts, the theatre and my colleagues (both faculty and students) in theatre, has never once been challenged.

A series of public information meetings, begun as a last resort in late February, have demonstrated to all those who wished to untangle fact from fiction, truth from rumour, that the indictment (if that is not too strong a word) is a just one.

Will we ever know the true reasons why PEAK has been "assassinated"? We are only now, with the application of some

public pressure, beginning to hear the false reasons: high costs, lack of training in "basics", insularity from the undergraduate programme, insularity from the remainder of the university, non-traditional bias, inability to find someone to lead this unique programme after my departure, unorthodox methodology, emphasis on therapy, nudity, cultism, etc., etc.

By the time you read this all these arguments either have been or will have been demolished in a series of public forums in the presence of the very people who have advanced them.

Does it matter why PEAK has been assassinated? Does it matter that the real reasons are spelled out for all of us to read? Perhaps we can discover the reasons for ourselves. No great amount of detective work is required. PEAK has been, from the outset, a sample of something different, a harbinger of what could be in the realm of professional training in the fine arts. As an oasis of the possible — the Ideal — and a crucible for the practical — the Real — it has already commanded and received attention, both nationally and internationally.

Unfortunately, but understandably, it has also posed a threat to the way other things are being done in its immediate environment. Comparisons are made, and too easily PEAK has been seen to be undermining the very fabric of the orthodox. Very quickly and very easily too (too quickly and too easily) it is seen as a disruptive force. Disruptive of what? The status quo of course.

But is it disruptive? What damage has PEAK done? Who, individually or collectively, has been damaged either physically, emotionally, intellectually, or psychically by PEAK? The undergraduates? The graduates? The faculty at York? The staff? The audiences in B.C., California, Ontario? The students and professionals in Poland? The good name of the university? How and what has PEAK disrupted? What is disruption? Is a different approach disruptive? A new idea? Must these different ways not be tried? Right here in the context of exploration advertised in the York University calendar? Or must the way — any — way be abandoned at York University? Must it be assessed and dismissed in such a "hasty, inadequate, unqualified and intellectually dishonest" manner? Surely not.

In a larger, historical perspective of the



PEAK during its Poland tour last fall. (Juliani is on far right.)

need for and the inevitable resistance to change, it is easier to see, if not to understand, why PEAK has posed such a threat during its brief stay at York. Change requires courage; resistance to change too often merely requires complacency. Whether or not the threat is necessary, the threshold must eventually be crossed. That, surely, is one of the cardinal aspects of education.

PEAK in a very short time, under unbelievably unfair working conditions and without sacrificing its endorsement of the traditional either in philosophy or execution, has tried to illuminate, identify and define that threshold and even to take a few timid steps into the darkness beyond it. Always guiding us has been the conviction that in education risks must be taken... calculated risks and at times less calculated risks. Our thresholds are all different, but thresholds they are and thresholds they will remain unless one is coaxed and decides to take that extra astronomical step.

Often this step involves a quantum jump. The quantum jump is always a risky adventure, even for a shaman, but it has invariably proved to be a peak experience. Risks, threat, adventure... why such dramatic terms, you may ask — terms so fraught with perilous connotations? Why? Because education, like Everest, is a mighty mountain that cannot but elicit our admiration and awe.

If we stand away from it we can safely inspect it through conventional and predictable binoculars. If we approach it a little closer, but maintain our secure investigative position, we can still be exhilarated by its immensity and breathtaking beauty. Positioned at the base of the mountain, however, and faced with the prospect of a long climb, we may begin to be less secure and even to be frightened by its craggy, threatening unknowns. And even once the climb has begun, the threat continues — the dangers often multiply. But the goal remains — to climb, toward the light, toward the summit of our ideals, toward the peak. Man at the PEAK — that is what the last two years will have been for me. Man striving for the peak — who he is, what he is doing there, why he is there, when and how did he travel there? There are never any definitive answers to the questions, not even at the PEAK.

Our thanks to Charles, Carolyn, Sandra, Lisa, David M., Brian, John I., Anne, Michael, Shirley, Raymond, Gloria, Gina, James, David B., Joseph, John B., Tony, Richard, Penelope, April, Dan, Robin and Glenn. All fellow travellers during the past two years.

Love from John, Donna and Alessandro Juliani.

(John Juliani is the director of PEAK, York's soon-to-be-discontinued graduate theatre programme.)

All letters should be addressed to the Editor, c/o Excalibur, room 111 central Square. They must be double-spaced, typed and limited to 250 words. Excalibur reserves the right to edit for length and grammar. Name and address must be included for legal purposes but the name will be withheld upon request. Deadline: Mon. 5 p.m.

Letters To The Editor

Founders council condemns CYSF post

It was the unanimous resolution of the March 30, 1976 meeting of the Founders College Student Council that the suggestion as reported in Excalibur re: a new paid position of executive assistant of the CYSF is contrary to the interests of the student body.

Therefore, we do not and will not support such a position being created unless any salary for this position be extracted from the original presidential salary. While we do not disagree with the creation of an executive assistant position in itself, we feel that any salary increment for this position would be an unnecessary waste of student money.

Founders College
Student Council

Reading '76

The Centre for Continuing Education appreciates the coverage which Excalibur gave to the conference, Reading '76. We would especially like to congratulate Evan Leibovitch for

his reporting style and accuracy. We value the good will which such reporting promotes between students and the outside community.

Thank you.

Marian E. Moore

PEAK affair

In reply to the statements presented in the April 1 issue of Excalibur (Grad theatre programme is cut), I would like to make the following statement as a student representative. Last Wednesday's meeting was organized out of a need to have a meeting between fine arts faculty, students and Dean Green. When the Wednesday meeting was planned (and, indeed, right up to the end of the meeting), the Dean was unwilling or unable to make an appearance before the students in any other way, due to the constitutional implications of his actions.

The meeting was called in order that he be able to provide input into the discussion — input that was called for by the students and by

the cost cuts coalition. It was also made clear to the CCC that the reps were not attempting to "co-opt and defuse the moratorium."

To say that we were simply "toeing the official line, and not representing student interests" is ludicrous. The Wednesday meeting was called in response to student needs, and the Dean agreed to come because of student interest and unrest, as expressed by the student representatives.

Doug Vowles,
first year student rep

Shuns post

I would like to take this opportunity to clarify a statement made in Excalibur (March 25) which indicated my intention of applying for the proposed position of executive assistant to the CYSF.

First, it has been two months since I mentioned any interest in this position to Barry Edson. At that time I was not certain (for obvious reasons) what the outcome of the Founders college elections would be. Had I lost the presiden-

cy of the FCSC, rumours of my interest in Edson's creation might have had some basis. However, not having lost that election, I feel my priority lies with the new student council of Founders college.

Second, there was no indication from Barry Edson that this executive assistant's position was to be one of surplus cost to the CYSF. In fact, there was no mention of salary; nor do I think there should be. I believe, and I have expressed this view to both Jay Bell and Edson, as well as to several other past and elect members of the CYSF, that more viable alternatives to an executive assistant, whether paid or unpaid, are possible.

If I may, I would like to clarify one more small item. I do not believe that Excalibur, I or anyone else, for that matter, has the right to merely sit back and criticize the president-elect and his council without knowing all the implications of the position.

People on this campus have the destructive tendency of condemning possibilities and potentialities rather than actualities. On

one hand, we had a president who was criticized for taking no courses; now we have a president criticized for taking a few courses. For once, why don't we wait at least until the Edson team gets into office, see what they produce, and then — if warranted — criticize the results.

A. L. "Sandy" McMurrich

Riled Rill

I would like to thank Wayne Daniels, Men's Athletic Banquet Chairman 1976, and M.I.A.C. President 1976-77 for coming to my defense concerning an article in the March 19 Excalibur which was written by Michelina Trigiani.

My staff was very disappointed with the article as they had tried very hard to make the banquets a success. Several people who attended the banquets have commented that they enjoyed the meal and Wayne's unsolicited letter has made me feel that some students appreciate our efforts.

Warren J. Rill
Rill Food Service Ltd.