



# Entertainment

Play is ambitious, interesting, but a little long

## Musical Memories of the dirty 30s

**Ten Lost Years**  
Studio Theatre  
Runs til April 4

review by Carol Ostry

My reaction to *Ten Lost Years* presented by Studio Theatre at Corbett Hall was a mixed one. I heartily enjoyed the musical based on memories of the Depression; however, by the end of the long production, I was beginning to ponder a change of title to *Ten Lost Hours*.

The play consisted of reminiscences of the Depression by a collage of Canadian characters from carefree train-hopping hobos to angry immigrant farmers, linked by songs. The play effectively captured the mournful

anger and the hardship of the Depression. The depth of content was impressive — I learned about everything from sewing "sweatshop" factories in Montreal to "those Goddamned Shirley Temple dolls" (or how to hop a train safely).

The acting was good, as the actors adopted a melee of characters each with individual reactions to the challenge of the times. The various dialogues added a lot to the characterizations. Still, certain scenes were overdone and sentimental, especially the classroom and movie house scenes in which the actors overacted, rather than acted, as children.

The music was a very positive note — the singing was well done with a harmonious

blend of voices, the mood of the songs varying from a sad train song to soothing church gospel to an uplifting tribute to the Bennett Buggy. Songs were accompanied effectively by a host of instruments.

The staging was well-structured and imaginative; the players made ultimate use of the levels of the rugged set of wood platforms. I was especially impressed by the staging of the radio scene replete with studio and sound effects man on stage left and captive home audience on stage right.

The major drawback of the play was its length. The play attempted to cover the entire ten years of the Depression and suffered from its ambition. I felt the play could easily have ended at intermission — Act II

tended to be repetitive, harping on the indignity of relief lines and the indifference of the Bennett government; I became somewhat indifferent myself as the play dragged on to its conclusion, reacting negatively to the whining descriptions of hardships and shifting restlessly in my seat.

Fortunately, the conclusion of the play grabbed my attention as each of the actors in turn introduced themselves and related a few lines about the role of their own relatives in the Depression. The magic of the first act was recaptured and my interest in the Depression which was initially inspired by the play was once again teasingly provoked. In general, *Ten Lost Years* was good entertainment sidetracked by overinclusiveness.



Abrasive Danny de Vito vows revenge...

## Jacques Brel sings flat

**Jacques Brel is Alive and Well**  
Northern Light Theatre  
Runs til April 12th

review by Peter J. Cole

The multi-layered, stark, asymmetrical set allows for variety and provides ample room for stage business. The theatre's thrust permits actor-audience intimacy. So — what happened on opening night?

*Jacques Brel is Alive and Well and Living in Paris* requires a tight cast, one which can portray roguishness, camaraderie, spontaneity, pathos, and contextual similitude. What is presented is a group of four, basically unconnected actors who are unsure of how to use the space and who are not comfortable in their rapport with the audience. The mid-day-in-the-Kalahari lighting of the opening number was hardly conducive to an intimate atmosphere. A cooler, more subdued wash or even atmospheric spots might have made everyone more comfortable, and ready for an enjoyable evening of music and song.

For the most part, the voices were dull, flat, and unresonating — more recitative than lyrical. The singers seemed to be saving their voices for something else or were afraid to use volume, range, and pitch. The voices were not unpleasant; rather, they were lacklustre, quantized, controlled, and limited. Although the words were usually clear and understandable, at times they were inaudible, left out, or swallowed. One had the feel-

ing that the singers and musicians had not rehearsed together very thoroughly because of checks and breaks in synchronism. Often of a sub-operatic quality, the acting was intermittently enjoyable and refreshing. There seemed to be a hesitancy to meld song and gesture, as though the one would upstage the other. When the initiative was taken and apt movements embellished a song, the result was pleasant and reviscent.

The second act was more consistently energetic as far as movement was concerned. Voice projection was still a problem but the added dramatic elements occupied the audience's attention. Overall, the choreography was mediocre and the blocking was often distracting. Since rehearsal is usually of very short duration in today's theatre, the development of a comprehensive troupe-like tightness and interactiveness is difficult and, even when successful, looks forced.

The music was creatively and innovatively directed and performed. At times the synthesizer melodic accompaniment seemed sketchy and unresolved, but music was Jacques Brel's saving grace. Richard Link and Binaifer Kapadia alternated on synthesizer and piano, and each did an admirable job of accommodating the singers and one another. The percussion was more of an augmentative for the synthesizer than for the piano.

If the music maintains its high quality and the singers throw the halter off their voices and create the appropriate atmosphere, this production would be well worth seeing.

## Tin Men humour shines

**Tin Men**  
Garneau Theatre  
Tolstar Pictures

review by Bill Mah

*Tin Men* is a surprisingly appealing comedy about some unappealing characters. Set in Baltimore in 1963, it tells the story of two aluminum siding salesmen, B.B. Babowsky (Richard Dreyfuss) and Ernest Tilley (Danny DeVito). Both are abrasive, unscrupulous and enough alike each other to become friends. Instead, however, they meet abruptly in a minor car accident where a fierce argument leads each to vow revenge.

After several skirmishes, their personal war soon entangles Tilley's unsuspecting wife, Nora (Barbara Hershey). Disenchanted with her gruff and self-centered husband, she is easy prey for his smooth-talking enemy. B.B. vengefully seduces her, only to fall unexpectedly in love. At about the same time, a state commission on consumer fraud starts investigating the two tin men, threatening both their licences and their dishonest livelihoods.

Despite this unusual plot, *Tin Men* is not another wild slapstick farce. It is more of a humorous and perceptive character study with elements of romance and social satire. The characters in *Tin Men* could easily have become caricatures. Instead, the screenplay of writer/director Barry Levinson combines with the convincing performances of well cast actors to make them seem fully human.

Their motives, worries and emotions will be familiar to everyone trying to live the American dream where Cadillacs are sometimes more important than wives. With great attention and affection, Levinson portrays the bitter-sweet lives of two such people.

*Tin Men* is remarkably similar to Levinson's most famous film, the critically acclaimed *Diner*. It is set in the same era, in the same city and even uses the same diner. Most importantly, however, *Tin Men* has the same comic ear for reproducing everyday conversation. Particularly funny are the lunchtime scenes where the gathered salesmen discuss, among other things, the implausibility of the *Bonanza* television series. "No wonder they get along so well on the Ponderosa," remarks one wit, "You've got a 50 year-old father and three 47 year-old sons."

In this movie, it is difficult to judge which is better: the clever script or the whole-hearted performances. DeVito and Dreyfuss are especially delightful when each is disgusted at the depths to which the other sinks. Hershey, with her quiet charm and controlled frustration make her the perfect foil for the two obnoxious men in her life. Moreover, even the supporting cast comes across as colorful and appealing.

In the end, *Tin Men* succeeds because of its witty screenplay and sparkling actors. However, it displays an even rarer quality of empathy and understanding. For a comedy, this movie has precious mettle.



...against Richard Dreyfuss in Tin Men