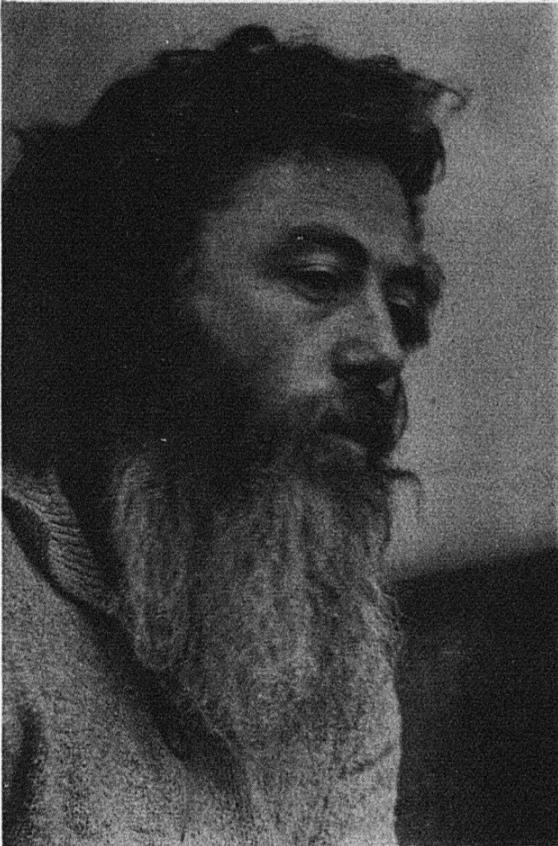
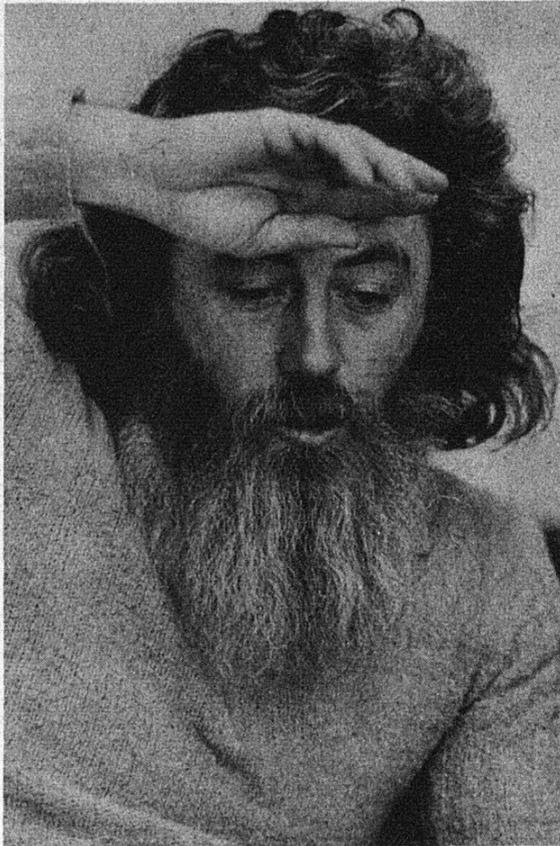


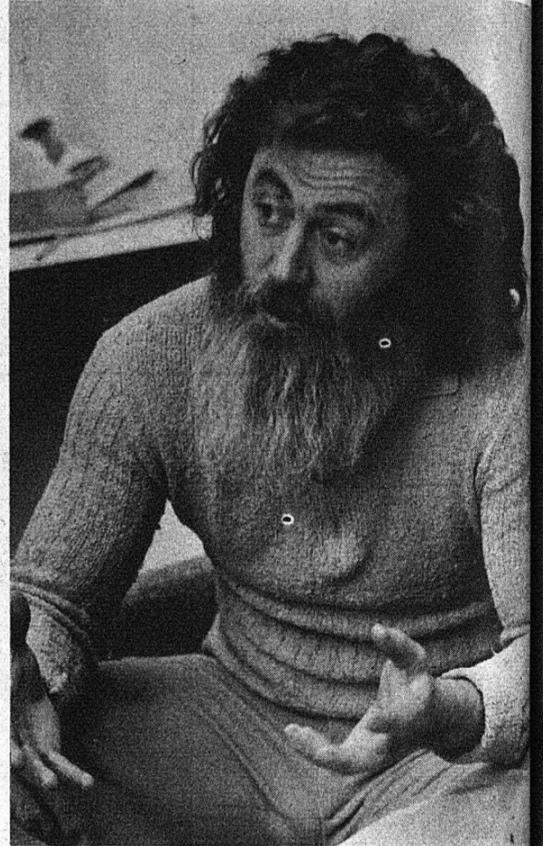
Photos by Brian Gavriloff



"I suppose one of the things we're trying to do in theatre is to make heroes..."



"I'm disappointed in the Citadel's unwillingness to take a gamble on Canadian theatre."



"They back out of it by saying the audiences aren't interested, and I say - bullshit!"

"There are things happening in this country..."

Theatre Passe Muraille is an exciting young theatre group with a lot to relate about Canada, Canadians, and the Canadian west. What's more, they have developed a rather unusual way of preparing and presenting their material, as university audiences can see for themselves in the company's performance of "The West Show" taking place in SUB Theatre tonight.

The following is the bulk of a conversation I had with the group's outspoken Artistic Director, Paul Thompson, who has some thought-provoking things to say about Canadian theatre.

"There's a big danger of everyone running away to Toronto and turning it into another New York. Some of the people we've had (Theatre Passe Muraille, that is) have been graduates of the U of A, and are much better than kids who've come out of the National Theatre School at that age."

These are encouraging words for fledgling Edmonton actors, and they are not the only ones Paul Thompson has. Paul has worked with Theatre Passe Muraille for a number of years, operating out of that mecca of Canadian theatre, Toronto. Of late, though, he has taken to presenting theatre in places it has never been seen before, and in a style which perhaps has never been used before.

Eternally optimistic, he believes that Canadians are just awakening to their own talent, and that all this talent needs is a chance to prove itself.

"I'm disappointed in the Citadel's unwillingness to take a gamble on

Canadian theatre," he says. "You can make money on Canadian theatre! That's the false argument that really has to be fought. Canadian theatre can be as profitable, if not more profitable than American or British theatre."

Pulling at his beard and waving his arms with artistic abandon, he goes on to reinforce his argument.

"These theatres have a responsibility (to Canadian material). They back out of it by saying the audiences aren't interested, and I say - bullshit!"

Last year Paul and Passe Muraille created a play called "The Farm Show", which is being followed up this year by "The West Show." In pursuing their own approach to the topics, the company would actually move into a community and observe the people around them. After assimilating feelings for the land and the history of the place they would come together and build a play through improvisational methods.

In effect, they have eliminated the need for playwrights.

"The idea of going out to places where plays were not normally done was to reach an audience that was hard to get at. The show is designed for touring, it's designed for fitting into any kind of space imaginable. We can re-organize the show, reblock it in an afternoon, if necessary."

Such mobility and flexibility would be envied by any theatre company in existence. Paul explains how it is possible.

"Well, we've got very good actors. They're a bit like jazz musicians, and they can jam off different situations. If there were a pillar in the middle of the area we wanted to use for acting they could

then incorporate that pillar into the show. The kind of plays that we do are able to build off accidental juxtapositions that we recognize are exciting and good."

By being completely flexible, the group can alter their productions continuously, even after it has commenced production.

"The point is not to have a complete, fantastic, brilliant product every time, but to be as straightforward in the presentation of that as possible and to say, 'Look, this is what we seek, this is where we are now, with your input we can make it better if necessary.'"

Made in Saskatoon, "The West Show" is a collage of incidents and personalities that molded the Canadian west in its growth.

"The show tries to deal with both historical and contemporary things. Which means that it goes all the way from Batoche to the tractor

demonstration of 1969 in Saskatoon, when the towers of the establishment were shivered and shaken, with Pierre Elliot Trudeau trembling up in the bosom of the Besbura Hotel."

"In between we touch on series of dreamers, idealists and pragmatists who like talking about their suffering, who obviously have developed a sense of their own being, who know who they are and are very happy to be where they are."

"I suppose one of the things we're trying to do in theatre is to make heroes, to give us a sense of ourselves and to be able to identify with heroic actions and people."

Before heading out the door Paul's last remark was "There are things happening in this country, it's just a great place..."

I can't think of a more hopeful note on which to part.



feature by W.P. Lewis