

ENTERTAINMENT

Filling that gap

Local magazine puts York in the limelight

By AGNES KUCHIO

York University is finally on the map. In a quiet, modest way perhaps, and perhaps only for some of the people some of the time, but it is happening. And Canadian Theatre Review, a quarterly magazine that evolved from a departmental news letter, is responsible.

According to its editor and instigator, Don Rubin, the two-year-old periodical was received with widespread critical acclaim: a magazine that would 'hold the mirror up' to the Canadian theatre was sorely needed. It is even beginning to make a dent internationally, says Rubin. "People were coming up to me at a festival

in Poland, asking highly specific questions about theatre in Canada, and I realized that they were all related to issues raised in CTR," he says.

"The very fact, for example, that Ernst Shumacher, an East German and one of the world's foremost authorities on Brecht offered to write a piece for CTR indicated that we are moving up internationally, he adds.

The piece he is referring to is in the current issue of CTR, which is entirely devoted to critics and criticism. The issue also contains, among others, a biography of the late Toronto critic Nathan Cohen, an insightful treatise on the psychology of critics, and a fairly definitive statement on what criticism is and should be by Rubin, himself an established critic.

He estimates that CTR, with a circulation of 5,000 reaches some 10,000 people. "It's in green rooms, offices and libraries all over the world," he says.

While it costs an estimated \$3.50 to produce the \$2.50 magazine,



A scene from Stratford's Ready, Steady, Go, illustrating CTR yearbook.

Rubin is optimistic about the financial future of the periodical and hopes to be in the black within five years. So much so, that he initiated a yearly record of theatre in Canada last year.

The coffee-table book, the first issue of which appeared before Christmas, is a total record of what happened and where in theatre in 1974. It contains a com-

plete list of casts, crews, writers and directors, is amply illustrated, and essays by the likes of Rubin and Herb Whittaker help to put it all in perspective. It's a handy guide to Canadian theatre and drama for anyone and, says Rubin, it has been selling "rather well."

CTR is sponsored by the Fine Arts department.

York defends a vision: theatre is social agent

By DON RUBIN

Some years back, the controversial American director and critic Charles Marowitz visited York to give a lecture about the years during the second war that French actor-aesthete Antonin Artaud had spent in a mental institution. Marowitz was then working in England where he had founded one of that country's most interesting experimental theatres, the Open Space located on Tottenham Court Road in Soho.

INVITATION

Marowitz had ostensibly come to Toronto at the invitation of one of the city's developing alternative theatres (the Canada Council paid his fare) but he had admitted privately that he was more interested in finding out something about the country that had produced his own favorite Canadian play and the one he had chosen to open his own theatre with some seasons before, *Fortune and Men's Eyes*.

At any rate, it was during this visit that Marowitz expressed curiosity about York and its theatre department. At that point, York's was the only one in Eastern Canada with a strong professional orientation (the start of York's program corresponds to the period when the previously exciting National Theatre School in Montreal was beginning to lose its professional focus) and Marowitz had long been interested in theatre training.

UNDERWHELMED

Sandwiched around Marowitz' visit to York were visits to a number of theatres here, small and large. To say that Marowitz was somewhat underwhelmed by his non-York experiences would perhaps be the grossest of understatements. As I recall, his exact descriptions of the theatre he saw around him included such choice epithets as "masturbatory", "uninteresting bullshit" and "derivative".

This, of course, was all in the days before the Factory had found itself its loft on Dupont Street, before the Tarragon had discovered Naturalism and before Theatre Passe Muraille and Paul Thompson had begun their experiments in docu-dramatizing Canadian life and history (experiments which only reached their peak in such moving and effective productions as *1837* and *The West Show*).

IMPRESSED

But as much as Marowitz was unimpressed by the outside theatre scene at that time, that's how much he was impressed by the potential being evidenced by York's Theatre Department. What Marowitz saw at York — and spoke about — were many of the same things that he himself was working toward: a coming to grips with the social role of theatre

rather than a mindless encouragement of outdated, first-night dress-up.

EGO TRIPS

What Marowitz did not see at York — and he was relieved not to see them — were the things one tends to find at so many North American Universities, things that many who are at York even now are surprised at not seeing — departments doing little more than playing at dramatic art full of ego productions for staff and students, departments staging plays more for the improvement of the "cultural climate" at the university than for the improvements of its student actors, designers and writers, departments which were more interested in turning out processed actors, directors, designers, writers and critics for yesterday's job market (all of them certified smart by their BAs) than in turning out artists who will create a meaningful theatre for tomorrow in their own image and out of their own experiences.

NO PRESSURES

That impressed Marowitz and, as time has proven, that same attitude has impressed some of this country's most important theatre professionals many of whom have directed or taught at York. People such as Marion Andre, John Juliani, Ron Singer, Norman Welsh, Mavor Moore, Elizabeth Shepherd, Bertram Joseph and William Lord to name just a few. This then was the base and remains the base upon which theatre at York has been built and it is a base that has been carefully nurtured and carefully protected from hard-to-resist ego pressures from the formation of the department in 1968-'69 by Joseph Green (now Dean of the Faculty of Fine Arts) to the present chairmanship of stage director Malcolm Black (Black directed the current *St. Lawrence Centre* "hit", *The Speckled Band*).

AGREEMENT

And while it cannot be said that everyone who has passed through the Department in its seven years of existence — as faculty or student — has been in total agreement on how best to achieve that theatre of tomorrow from the seeds of today, it is certainly safe to say that there has been a consistent belief in the possibility of that idea throughout. It was that vision, I think, that started theatre at York and it was that vision that Marowitz so enthusiastically responded to in the early days of the program, in the days when York's Performing Arts Series amounted to little more than weekend cartoon festivals and touring amateur shows and in the days when the Canadian theatre itself was just beginning that long creep toward genuine self-awareness.

Spontaneity enlivens PEAK's work

By FORSTER FREED

You enter the theatre to a mixed assortment of sounds — a cacophony of cries, screams, laughs, and whispers that fill the room as you find a seat. A handful of actors, in various states of dress and undress, filter through the space, their movements painting a visual presence as jarring as the symphony of sound which accompanies it.

Gradually, their movements slow and the actors head toward the corners of the theatre. In time, the sound also grows dim — and the room stills to a hush. For the moment, all is silence. The actors are ready to begin.

"STREAMING"

The actors in question are member of PEAK (York's Graduate Theatre Programme) and the performance that is about to start is a "streaming" session. Streaming, a theatrical process which PEAK evolved under the guidance of programme coordinator John Juliani, is the most fundamental aspect of the company's work. Clearly if PEAK does succeed in making a theatrical contribution of lasting significance, it will be closely linked to the kind of work that is best represented by streaming.

Streaming, briefly defined, is a form of "spontaneous-acting". By allowing a group of actors to work without a directory they can

create spontaneous theatre.

SEGMENTS

In its present form, a streaming session is divided into two major segments of roughly twenty-five minutes each, separated by a ten minute interlude called the "Oasis". The first section is devoted to non-verbal explorations; the last to more verbal kinds of creation; and the "Oasis" (which uses personal material of a confessional nature) is a link which develops the company's subconscious resources. And because streaming is so loosely structured, a given session can incorporate material culled from every aspect of life and art, ranging from non-verbal religious ritual to the most sophisticated repartee, and from basic sexual conflicts to the conflicts reported in the day's headlines.

REAL ACTING

Nor should streaming be confused with improvised theatre, for it gives the actors a freedom unheard of in more traditional improvisational forms. According to Juliani, the spontaneity which this allows is superbly suited to the training of the actor. "The value of streaming," he explains, "is the realization that every moment that you are acting is real and honest, since spontaneity forces the actor to use personal material." He adds, "actors have been working with spontaneity from the beginning of time. It's just that we've developed a form."

IN CONTACT

It is the development of the streaming form that has allowed PEAK to test the potential of spontaneity, not just in the rehearsal hall but in the theatre as well. By asserting that spontaneity has significance as an art form, PEAK has linked its work with similar twentieth century explorations, beginning with those of the French surrealists in the 1920's. The surrealists asserted that through spontaneity, human beings could overcome the barriers which keep them from contact with themselves, and each other.

It is the implications of that kind of thesis which seems to lie beneath PEAK's explorations with

streaming. Juliani can see the day when audiences will come to a streaming session just as they go to see a film or more traditional theatre fare. And they will go with the express purpose of combining theatre with therapy, play with work. "Because everything is spontaneous", states Juliani, "the audience could be the impulse for the shape of an entire evening. In other words, the actor-therapists could serve as a kind of litmus for the audience. Needless to say, you are talking here about performers so "together" that they could deal with any kind of situation."

CONTROVERSY

Naturally, that kind of performance lies in the future — for streaming is at a comparatively early stage of its development. For although the company is well equipped to play "to" an audience, it is not yet ready to play "with" an audience in the way ultimately envisioned by Juliani. But even at this early juncture, streaming has produced explosive results and a good deal of controversy.

After a series of PEAK performances at the Open Theatre Festival in Wrocław, Poland this past October (one of which nearly resulted in a theatre riot), one hostile critic described streaming as "much ado about nothing". Others, equally sceptical, regard the search for spontaneity as a futile one, while other observers point to the breakdown between life and art posited by streaming as potentially dangerous.

ULTIMATE WORTH

The accuracy of those judgements, however, and the ultimate assessment of streaming's worth, are matters yet to be determined. But at a time when so much traditional theatre has lost its direction and the so called alternative theatres are floundering, streaming may well point the way toward the theatrical future.

PEAK's Open Streaming sessions are held in MacLaughlin Dining Hall (The PEAK Passage) every Thursday and Friday morning (starting next week) at 11:00.



PEAK in Wrocław