

## Canadian humour: Is it definable?

By STEPHEN OVERBURY

Canadian humor? Even the experts have trouble defining it. "Canadian humor," says Canadian writer Donald Jack, winner of this year's Leacock Medal for Humor Award, "is something I haven't been able to answer for myself." "But there definitely is such a thing," says Doug Sneyd, vice-chairman of the first Leacock Festival of Humor, a three-day event which was held in Orillia in early August. "Don Harron is an example of someone who has got a portion of what is distinctly Canadian."

"Until Stephen Leacock's works became internationally known, Canadian humor wasn't born," says John Stark, an actor who makes his living impersonating Leacock and performed in the Merry Posa Revue, the festival's main attraction.

The fact these professionals couldn't be more specific is understandable: there are so many approaches to Canadian humor that it is hard to pinpoint basic characteristics. But on one thing practically all Canadian humorists are agreed: if Canadian humor is to develop, it will require a lot more attention. At present,

Canadian comics and humor writers are suffering badly from neglect.

"Why there is almost no humor on Canadian television," says Martin Bronstein, co-founder of The Jest Society and a performer-director at the Leacock Festival. "The four Wayne and Shuster specials a year are hardly worth talking about."

Bronstein is one of 14 Canadian comedians who stage the festival revue in an attempt to establish a focal point for Canadian humorists. Such familiar comedians as Harron, Don Cullen, Roy Woodsworth and Dave Broadfoot took part and earned much less than they would have for other engagements, but they were happy to become involved "because," says Bronstein, "they believe that this is the one thing that can possibly focus on Canadian humor."

The idea for a festival originated last winter at an Orillia Rotary Club meeting. Usually some event was held each year to remind the public of the part Orillia played in Leacock's works, but the club decided to become more adventurous this year and to make it a three-day event. Albert Warson, who was handling public relations for Manufacturers Life, which

presents the Leacock Medal for Humor, suggested the board launch a festival of humor. Since 1947, the Leacock Medal, an award given for the best Canadian humor book of the year, has been presented annually at dinner in Orillia.

The expansion of festivities with the revue was too large a project for the club to handle by itself. An independent board of directors was set up with a \$10,000 budget and the sole purpose of launching the revue. Financial backing by the club would be only for its first year.

Bronstein was hired as director and overall co-ordinator and was responsible for bringing in all of the performers.

To discuss and develop ideas, the board spent a day with Tom Burrows, general manager of the Shaw Festival. Mayor Moore, who was instrumental in organizing the Charlottetown Festival, was also consulted. Moore saw the project as one which would eventually be devoted to all forms of Canadian humor, including musical comedy, film presentations and theatre.

Gerald Prately, director of the Ontario Film Institute, loaned the festival some Mack Sennett films. The result of all these efforts was a resounding success. The revue, which was staged at the old Orillia

Opera House (2,200 seats), was sold out for all three performances.

Over 750 people jammed the Leacock Memorial Home (which at one time was Leacock's summer cottage) for an afternoon of musical presentations and a performance of Leacock's play, *The Raft*.

About 25,000 persons showed up at Couchiching Beach Park either as participants or as spectators at a wide range of activities, including an auction and a street dance.

But the people of Orillia tended to ignore the program relating to Leacock, although they participated in the other activities. Many feel that *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town*, perhaps his best known book, pokes fun at local residents. Then there are those who still remember Leacock as an old man who roamed the streets in shabby clothes, and still refuse to acknowledge him as an internationally acclaimed humorist.

The board of directors is hoping for an even bigger festival next year. There is talk of renovating the Edwardian style opera house. So far, Fire department officials haven't allowed anyone to stand during a performance, but all the actors agree that the acoustics are tremendous. There is even a

possibility of building a new theatre on the Memorial Home grounds.

"Canadians," says Bronstein, "have had so little of Canadian humor—and I know this from four years with The Jest Society and from this revue—that they lap it up. They're so hungry for it that when they hear comedy about themselves, they laugh. The revue has sold out and we've got good reviews. I just can't see why it isn't possible to have a humor centre. "Look at Stratford and Shaw, and Niagara-on-the-Lake: they're all very successful and they all use Canadian plays. The musicals in Charlottetown are incredibly successful. Why can't Canadian comedy, put together in one place, also be successful?"

"And why not in Orillia," argues Sneyd. "Orillia is almost the same distance from Toronto as Toronto is from Stratford or Niagara-on-the-Lake. It's a designated tourist mark with 10,000 cars travelling through it each day. The potential for making it the Canadian humor capital is tremendous. And besides...it's Mariposa."

Would Leacock have wanted such a centre? Perhaps. "Humor," he once said, "in its best and greatest sense, is perhaps the highest product of our civilization."

movie review

### 'Where the Lilies Bloom'

By DANIELLE THIBEAULT

This new movie, rated G (General Audience), is one of the better pieces of entertainment offered by United Artists this year. It offers a warm, lifelike portrayal of the Luther children struggling for survival after the death of their parents and the 14-year old girl who tried so hard to keep them together.

Julie Gholson offers a strong portrayal as Mary Call, the young girl on whose shoulders fall the burdens of the promises she made to her father on his deathbed. To Roy Luther, she gave her word to keep the family together and Kiser Pease from marrying her older sister, Devola. She also promised to maintain the Luther pride by never accepting charity.

For survival, Mary Call starts the family on an almost exhausting schedule of gardening, harvesting and wildcrafting. They manage to remain together by propagating the myth that Roy Luther is still alive though still quite ill.

The responsibilities weigh heavily on Mary Call and many times she feels there's a dam inside about to burst under the mounting pressures. Her brother, Romy, begins to complain about the lack of sleep and the poor grades, 4-year old Ima Dean becomes so confused in the charade, she believes her father to be alive still and Devola, very much in love with Kiser Pease, has begun to doubt Roy Luther's fears about her suitor.

The burden is too heavy for the little girl in shirttails who finally breaks down and offers herself in

marriage to Kiser for the sake of family unity. But Kiser is a wiser man than Roy Luther had ever given him credit for, and he is also a good man which Mary Call comes to realize as she finally agrees to his marriage with Devola.

Where the Lilies Bloom is mostly a movie about growing up. It's also a movie about family love and the struggle for unity yet a search for an identity among the group - the first sign of healthy growth.

It's a most pleasant movie, warmly portrayed and rich with intelligent, unobtrusive dialogues, crisp, fresh sceneries and love. The kind that grows on mountains, in grey shacks and among the Luther family.

If you've missed it this time, you really shouldn't the next time you have a chance. Beautiful!



### Exhibits at Mem Hall

Martin Demaine has established a glassworks at Mactaquac, one of only a handful in Canada. An exhibition of his recent work is now displayed in the Art Centre Studio in Memorial Hall where it can be seen until the end of the month. The fourteen vases, bottles, goblets, a pitcher and a bowl are all blown in coloured glass. He favours golds and blues, some delicate and transparent, others completely opaque.

Martin Demaine is happy to have interested people visit his shop. Since he moved from Little Bartibog in the spring, hundreds have watched him at work. He starts by taking a blob of the molten glass from the furnace onto the end of a pipe, and then manipulates it into the desired shape, with many returns to the furnace for reheating. After the object is formed, it cools slowly in a separate furnace.

In the Art Centre Gallery is a selection of twenty-four paintings from the UNB Permanent Collection, most of them recently hanging in public places on the campus. The University owns over three hundred items, official portraits, sculptures, gifts and purchases. This exhibition will be shown until September 30th, when the paintings will be distributed again around the campus.

The annual exhibition of reproductions for student loan will be on view in the Studio until Friday the 27th. At 10 a.m. on that day they will be available to the students, one per person, to borrow until April.

An exhibition entitled *Media* will be shown in October. It is really seven individual exhibitions by seven artists illustrating different techniques. Videotapes accompany the exhibition with each artist describing his process. Tom Forrestall demonstrates the technique of egg tempera painting, for instance.

movie review

### 'For Pete's Sake'

By DANIELLE THIBEAULT

This movie is unreal, a bit too much at times to be funny. You'll find yourself laughing all right, but at the punch lines more than at the actual script. You see Pete is Peter Robinson (Michael Sarrazin), husband of Henriette (Barbara Streisand), a cabdriver who's received a hot tip from Nick, the radio dispatcher, the U.S. Agricultural Secretary is on a secret mission to Moscow

to conclude a special deal with the Russians concerning the sale of PORK BELLIES (I didn't write the script). Pete figures a \$3,000 investment could take him from rags to riches. The trouble is to find someone to lend him \$3,000. Henri only wants to help so she borrows from a scruffy-looking character at 20 per cent per week. And then the weeks pass by without any rise in the price of pork bellies. Pete's dear ol' brother is full of "I told

you so's", the "fat-assed grisley bear" is snickering and unbeknownst to Pete, Henri's in trouble. Big trouble.

Henri goes from afternoon hustling to package-carrying to cattle rustling to jail in an effort to keep her husband from selling out his shares in pork bellies.

The slapstick comedy routines compare poorly with those of "What's up Doc?" which was not an extraordinary success in itself. The jokes barely fall short

of ridicule and most of the scenes are incredible in that they aren't realistic. For example: he's a cabdriver and they're supposed to be deep in debt, yet they live in an apartment that would put Better Homes and Gardens to shame and she's wearing a new outfit everytime you blink an eye. You'll probably notice a lot more of that as the movie progresses.

Barbara Streisand doesn't particularly shine in her role of Henriette (Henri) Robinson. She's just there. And Michael Sarrazin, well he sort of disappears in the confusion (like blending in with the woodwork). They don't seem too well suited as a couple and I guess you could blame the lack of depth of the script for that. Too bad, it's a terrible waste of talent.

The movie is not entirely unfunny but too many of the truly funny scenes seem to be cut short and the audience is left squirming uneasily in their seats.

A poor commercial, not-so-funny movie about unnatural people in unreal situations. Disappointing though still funny enough on the whole to justify seeing it just for fun.

The Inside Section needs short stories, poems, anything! Send 'em in!