

Mignonne's Michael Naxos wants no art for art's sake

by Elaine Ostry

The force of Michael Naxos' personality is felt immediately, with his smile and strong handshake. Naxos is the artistic director of the newly created Mignonne Productions. He is directing *The Sea Horse* by Edward J. Moore, and is obviously very excited about the project. Smoking cigarette after cigarette in a long black holder, Naxos talked to me about the production.

The Sea Horse is a love story between a sailor, Harry, and an obese bar owner, Gertrude. It is a comedy/drama, and as Naxos claims, is human, hilarious, and poignant. "It is about how society forces sublimation on certain people who are different," says Naxos. "It forces them to adopt facades and bitterness as defenses."

There are only two actors in this play, Laura Thaw and Larry Reese, so establishing a chemistry between the two was vital. Naxos is pleased with their work. The interview is periodically postponed by the photographing of the actors performing a humorous scene. Naxos laughs each time as if he hadn't heard it before.

Naxos points out with pride "our prize", the set's 1944 jukebox. It was the product of a long search. Naxos and his crew rooted out several jukeboxes, but rejected them all when they found this one, "purely by chance — it was down in this man's basement."

Naxos recounts one hilarious incident that occurred during rehearsal. "Gertrude is supposed to throw a glass of soda at Harry — of course, she is supposed to only have a little in, but Laura filled it all the way. She threw it and Larry's mouth was open, and the soda spouted back to her in this long stream. . . we had to break up rehearsal for that, we were laughing too much."

The Sea Horse is Mignonne Productions' first play, and two more are planned for this season. Mignonne Productions is a brand new company, formed only five months ago by Naxos and producer Doris Strasdin.

"Mignonne Productions," says Naxos, "had two objectives. One, to put on good entertainment. Two, to create a larger work market for young actors. We are not out to put on 'artsy' plays for arts' sake."

Michael Naxos has enjoyed a career spanning twenty-nine years, including many successes as actor and director. He has won several Caciques (the Latin American Oscar) for both of these talents. He worked in South America for many years, as well as England, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. He has performed in the West End, and at Stratford with the Royal Shakespeare Company and has also worked in films and T.V. In recent years, Naxos has concentrated on directing.

Naxos had lived in Canada for three years residing in Edmonton for most of that time. He directed *Marriage-Go-Round* for Chinook Theatre last year and runs the drama department for John Casablanca. He likes our city — except for the weather. Naxos expects to stay here for a few more years, then move on. "I'm a bit of a gypsy," he says.

According to Naxos, Edmonton's theatre scene has "great atmosphere — and it's progressing, even in the two-and-a-half years I've been here." It is, however, difficult to find a theatre. Edmonton, claims Naxos, needs more theatres: "There would be more plays if there was more available space."

Canada, Naxos says, is a young country with a great future in the theatre world. There is room for talent to grow. Canada needs older directors to lead the way, and more people need to get involved. Naxos is outraged at Canadian actors who move to the States to work. "They go there expecting some tinsel kind of Hollywood, not realizing the tremendous competition — and unemployment — among actors there. . . The Canadians should stay here, and do something for Canada," he says vehemently. "If they keep leaving, the quality of Canada is going to remain green."

Naxos sees a bright future for Western Canada. "In four years or so, Western Canada will be the mecca of the motion picture industry in Canada," he said. He cites the pictures shot here as the beginnings of the movement: *Draw, Birds of Prey, and Running Brave*.

In the meantime, Naxos is anticipating applause for *The Sea Horse*. "It's got great comedy, which is always popular, plus some heavy dramatic moments."



Our intrepid writer with Michael Naxos and the prize 1944 jukebox.

photo Alex Miller

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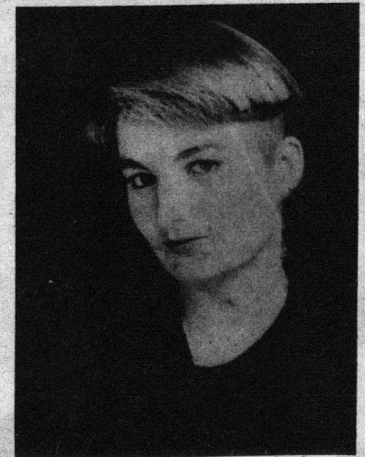
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