

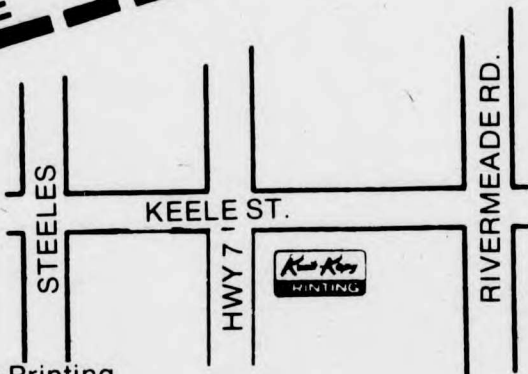
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Three's company

Paul Turrin

A new comedy which opened last night at the Bathurst Street Theatre asks the burning question of whether there is indeed sexual diversity in Toronto, and if not, why not. The answer seems to be a cautious 'perhaps'.

Stephen Ralstan's first play, **Mixed Company**, centres on the relationships and conflicts that crop up when the paths of a woman, a straight male, and a gay male somehow coincide at one of the city's nocturnal meat markets. Directed by Doug Hilker, the action centres around the interactions of the three principals, supported by a myriad of characters who flit in and out of their circle.

Affected negatively by David Mamet's **Sexual Perversity in Chicago** which played the same theatre last year, Ralstan says, "The title suggests it has a negative look at sexuality and also that he didn't like the characters he wrote about. They're very one-dimensional and they don't really seem to grow." When asked whom he considers to be an influence on his work, Ralstan said that besides the negative influences he was essentially interested in "real life". He is concerned with people not "relating" to each other properly: "In many ways people are becoming more and more alienated. Nobody wants to accept anyone else who is even slightly different."

Coming from South Africa, Ralstan has in his background experience with the alienation between people: "I think it's more hazy here whereas in South Africa, when it comes to racial prejudice they don't have to pretend—they've got it in the law. Here even with sexuality, it's

'in' to be liberal, and on paper people will say that they accept other people but in natural fact they often don't."

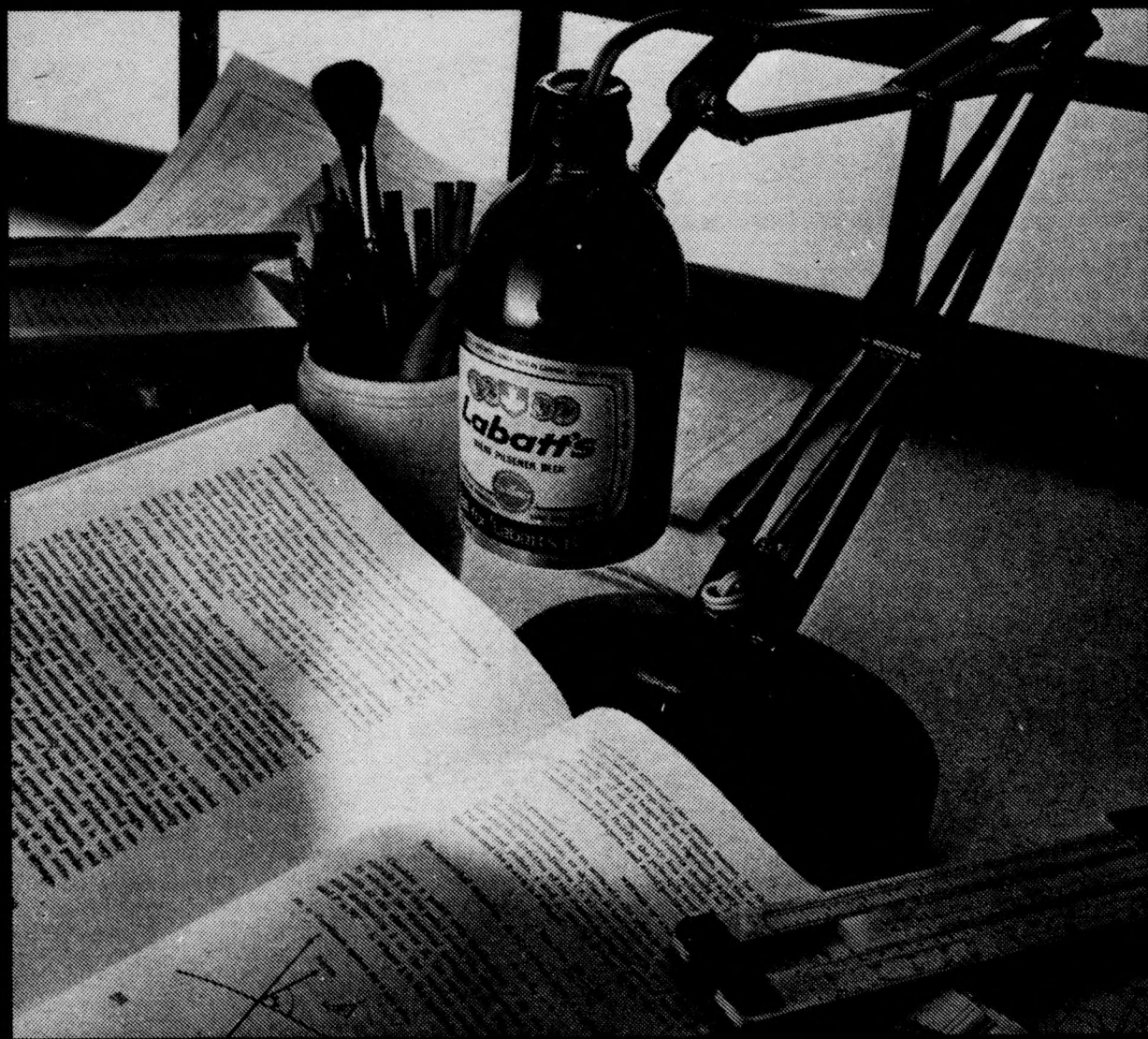
With a background in psychology and sociology Ralstan feels that he is able to give some sociological relevance to the play; "My job is scientific writing, research into drugs and alcohol. I keep my ears open for the way people talk and I didn't find it all negative." Plays like Mamet's and movies like **Cruising** and **Looking for Mr. Goodbar** strike Ralstan as "ridiculous" because "the moral is that the people who go to



single's bars and the people who enjoy sex...have to be punished in some way."

Nor is Toronto's cultural diversity of much comfort to Ralstan. "People in general seem wary of each other. They come from all over the world but they all live in their own ghettos." As to the burning question posed at the beginning of this article, Ralstan says, "Some people read **Mixed Company** and say that it will never happen, but that's the whole reason I wrote the play—so that in the future it will happen. I suppose that's the propaganda of the play."

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