

# Arts & Entertainment

## Wright brings enthusiasm to controversial play

interview by Kevin Law

For actors choosing to reside in Edmonton, the rich, diverse, and vibrant local theatre community is one of the most oft-cited reasons for extended sojourns in this northern burg.

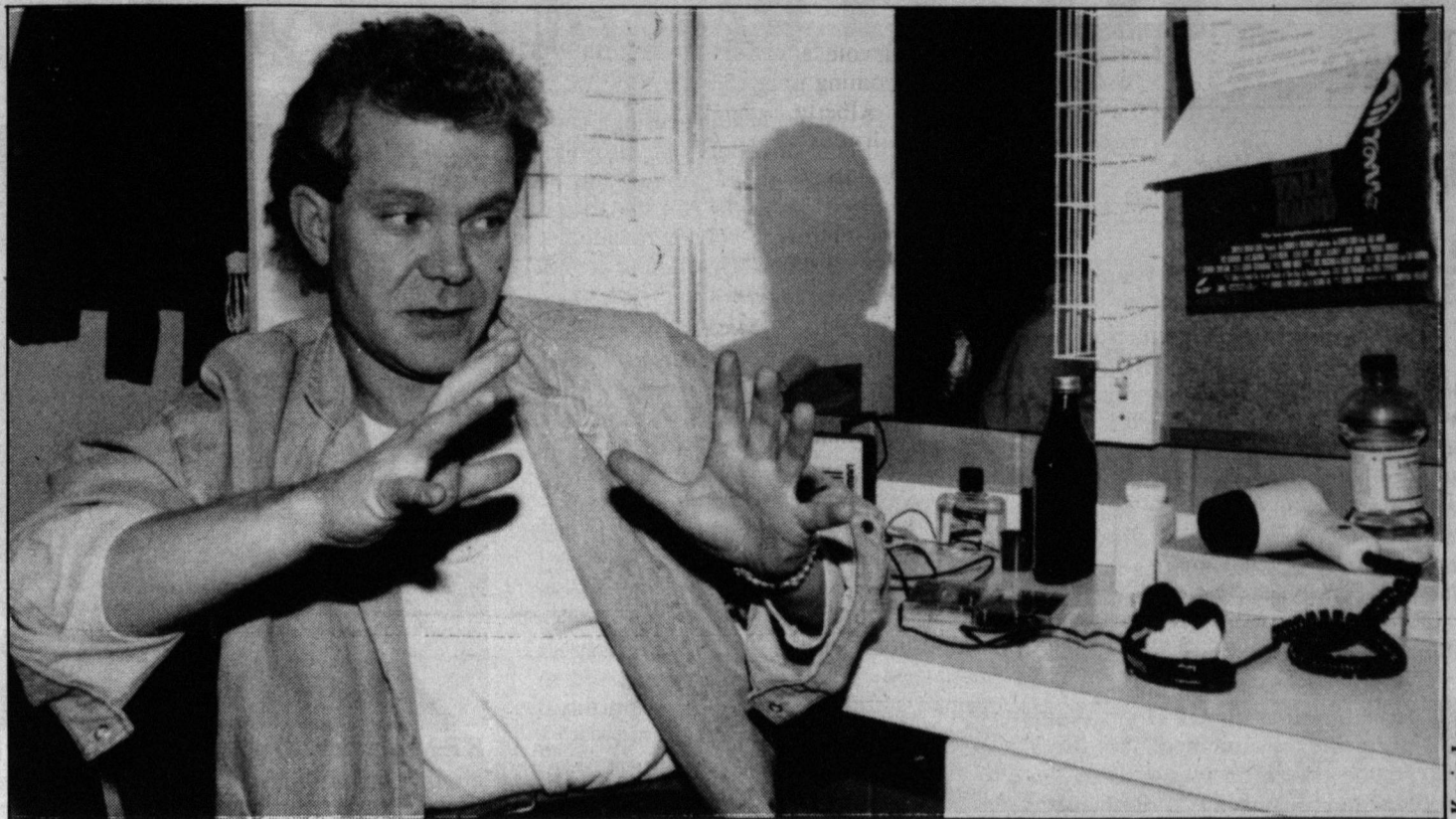
That kind of objective rationalism is one reason why straight ahead actor John Wright hasn't left yet. But as he gears up for the leading role in the current Citadel Rice Theatre production of Eric Bogosian's controversial play *Talk Radio*, he admits there is another more emotional reason for becoming an Edmonton denizen: love.

Having come here a year ago last fall to play a role in *A Lie of the Mind* for the Phoenix, Wright met Marianne Copithorne, a firmly rooted Edmonton actress. Now living together and planning to get married, Wright unabashedly asserts that "the major reason I'm here, aside from liking what theatre is all about, is that I happen to be in love with a woman who lives here."

Two working actors living together however, is "great and not great." Copithorne is currently working in Calgary until May, leaving Wright to lament "I never see her shows and she never sees mine, and she's my best critic."

It will likely be a shame that Wright's "best critic" may not be afforded the opportunity to see him in his latest role as Barry Champlain. His character is an intense and indignant radio talk show host whose highly rated "talkback" show is about to go national with its volatile brand of issue-bashing. Wright feels the play is marvelously constructed in that the entire drama unfolds in the real time of the play's hour and forty five minute length, thus eschewing the traditional classic structure of a complete beginning, middle, and end.

Wright speaks with excitement about his character, for there is no one dimensional perspective in Champlain's personality. Instead, frustrated energy percolates



Actor John Wright has landed a variety of roles with his straight ahead approach. His latest is in the Citadel's Rice Theatre production of *Talk Radio*.

Kevin Law

to the surface because "he wants to deal with what he considers world shattering issues. But instead," Wright explains, "he gets a bunch of loony callers talking about their dogs and orgasms and pets and baseball scores." As a result, "he humors them, but most of the time he puts them down and treats them like dog meat, yet it hurts him to do it because he wants something a little more substantial."

Wright likes intense characters and he's played several. "I've sometimes been accused of having too much energy," he offers in the way of explanation. "I like people who think on their feet. It's so much fun to have that energy."

The result of such personal kinetic rhythm is to be cast a lot as an "angry pre-middle age man who is not necessarily a very nice person." But Wright hastens to add that "these roles are juicy bloody roles, and most of the time they're lead roles, which is fabulous. It's a hell of a lot better than playing Prince Valiant, or

especially that big bore Hamlet."

Such a no nonsense attitude can't be all bad because Wright has landed numerous television and film roles, and needless to say, he has firm views on this subject as well.

"Television is hurry up and wait," Wright asserts, "where stage is more immediate, but if you're a good actor, the disciplines cross each other very well." Becoming pensive for a moment, Wright adds to this line of thought "... unless you're a pretty boy actor, always looking for lead roles. That would be the most boring thing I could do; can you imagine playing leading men all your life?"

Wright's straight ahead approach seems to apply to contemplation about the profession itself, which for him, does not require intellectualizing.

"I don't really have an acting philosophy beyond listening to your director and your fellow actors, and then get on with it. Sitting around discussing for an hour is frustrating," Wright remarks, revealing his preference for the practical side of things. He notes he's been criticized for this approach, "but I can't do it any other way. My acting is purely a gut instinct. It's very visceral instead of intellectual."

It is no surprise then, that Wright has had no formal training, which he regrets very much. He concludes with high praise for the University's much acclaimed drama department, wishing there had been such a program available to him.

But if intensity of conviction and spirit are any indication, Wright's performance in *Talk Radio* should be most captivating indeed.

## Youth Orchestra announces its Concerto contest winners

by Mike Spindloe

The Edmonton Youth Orchestra has announced the winners of the Northern Alberta Concerto Competition, sponsored by the EYO and the Alberta Registered Music Teachers Association. Winners were selected in three categories: Senior Winds and Brass, Senior Strings and Junior Strings.

In the Senior Winds category, the winner was U of A student David Hayman, 22, who played Mozart's Clarinet Concerto in A major. Hayman studies with Dennis Prime, a sessional instructor in the U of A Department of Music.

In the Senior Strings category, the winner was Angela Luchkow, 17, who played Katchaturian's Violin Concerto in D major. Luchkow studies with Ranald Shean.

In the Junior Strings category, the winner was Olivia Lou, 13, who played the first movement of Mozart's Violin Concerto No. 5 in A major.

Both Hayman and Luchkow will perform with the EYO at a concert in Convocation Hall on February 19 at 3:00 pm. Lou will perform with the EYO's second orchestra on May 28 at 3:00 pm, also at Convocation Hall.

## Phoenix' Hunting Cockroaches about more than bugs

by P. J. Groeneveldt

They are Polish emigres; he a writer, she a nationally famous (in the old country) actress. He has writer's block and she can't get an equity car. They're two months behind in rent on the squalid New York City apartment they inhabit. Such are the two main characters (played by David Mann and Maralyn Ryan) in the Phoenix Theatre's new show *Hunting Cockroaches*, directed by Jim Guedo and written by Janusz Olowacki, which opens Friday night at the Kaasa.

No actual insects will appear on stage, promises cast member Anne McGrath. However, the hapless couple will be subjected to nocturnal visits from various urban-area characters: a nouveau-riche couple, immigration authorities, census

takers, the KGB, and so on (all played by Blair Haynes, Richard Gishler, and Anne McGrath).

"Two weeks ago it was a comedy," says McGrath. "We are now at the point where we need feedback from an audience to remind us. I think the characters (of Mann and Ryan) are dear and funny... and quite poignant. We are fairly confident it will be well received."

The set, a masterpiece of urban decay by David Shelton, will play an integral part in the show during the "nightmare/flashback/fantasy" scenes in which the verminous visitors appear.

Audience members can expect a wonderful "17th century quasi-Shakespearean comedy" and a fact-based farce about making your way in a foreign land.



Anne McGrath, currently involved in the Phoenix Theatre's production of *Hunting Cockroaches*.