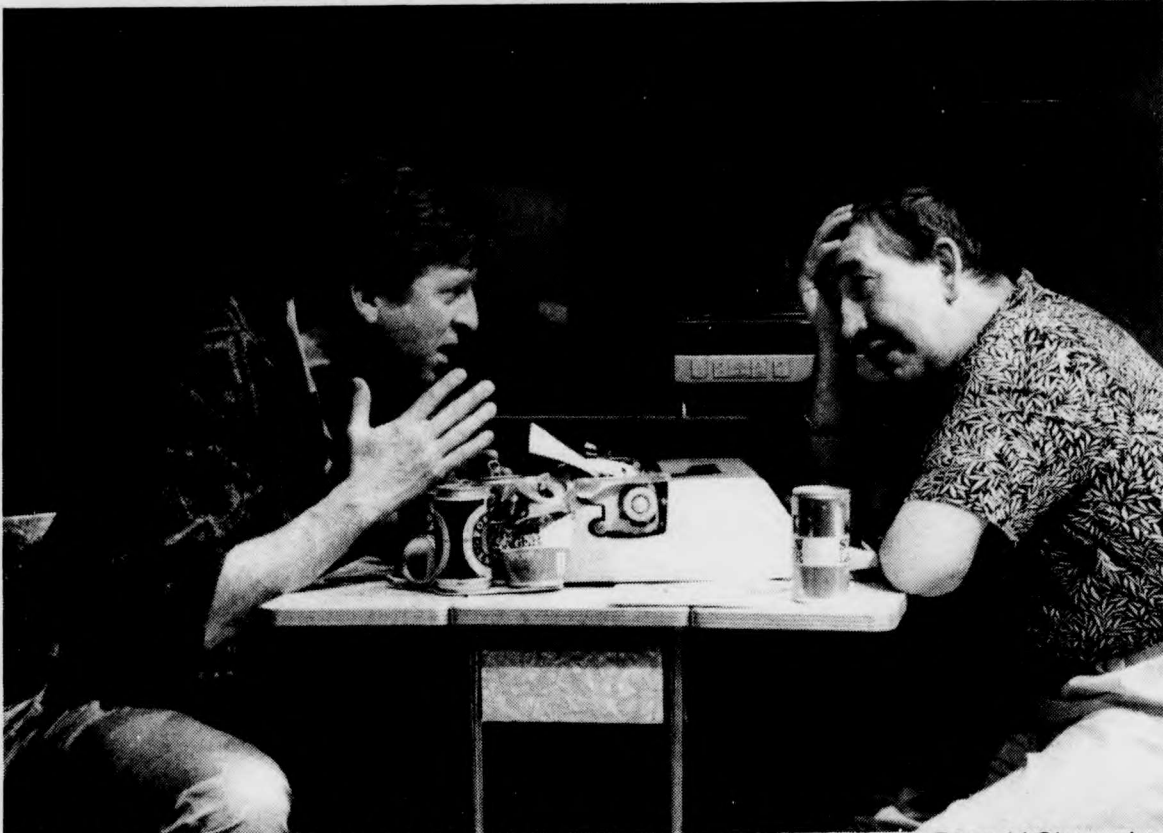


Artists selling out: Something to bitch about



CANT YOU GET IT THROUGH YOUR THICK SKULL? Toronto Free Theatre's *Emerald City*, a play about the commercialization of the arts, will continue until February 7.

By KEN KEOBKE

Bitch bitch bitch. In Toronto Free Theatre's production of *Emerald City*, screenwriter Colin (R.H. Thompson) bitches with his wife Kate (Susan Cox), with his slimy leech associate Mike (Graeme Campbell), with his whining agent, with his banker. He bitches with Mike's beautiful girlfriend. And everyone bitches with each other.

The main bitching is about Colin and Kate's inability to produce art that can also be commercially successful. The couple's recent move from Melbourne, Australia to the

centre of power, Sydney, is the catalyst for the erosion of their artificial enlightened ideals. The slide from high ideals to no ideals results in hypocrisy and forms the basis of the humour of *Emerald City*.

Playwright David Williamson, best known for his screenplays of *Phar Lap* and *Gallipoli*, exposes this hypocrisy with a stream of staccato one-liners. At one point, Mike criticizes a certain director, saying he doesn't know how to "direct shit from his ass." But there are also times when the lines degenerate into Australian slang. When Mike tells

his girl friend to "... see if you can go get us a couple of cups of coffee without getting yourself raped," there was nothing but an embarrassed silence in the theatre. If this is Australian humour, it doesn't translate to the Canadian stage.

But, despite such lapses and ethnocentric references, the play's central metaphor works well. The trip from Melbourne to Sydney could just as easily be Vancouver to Toronto, or even Toronto to New York. *Emerald City* is about the commercialization of the arts—artists selling out and denying their

heritage and values—and about the sad results when artistic choices are left in the hands of bankers. Mike becomes relatively successful after producing a spectacle about Lesbian Nuns and proposing to transfer the life struggle of an Australian aboriginal woman to a Tennessee setting in a film starring Richard Pryor. The idea doesn't seem quite so absurd when one remembers the number of movies shot in Canada, such as *Roxanne* and *Stakeout*, that pretend our cities and countryside are actually in the United States.

Indeed, though Williamson obviously didn't intend it, much of the play can be seen as an indictment of the Canadian government's recent free trade move, which threatens to put our culture in the hands of the highest bidder. Colin's wife criticizes his choice to go for commercial rather than artistic success, saying

that "... primetime is to the US what McDonalds is to cooking." It's ironic, however, that to make these statements, TFT found it necessary to import an Australian play.

The production was directed by Australian Derek Goldby, and it was probably his decision that the play be performed in accent. And while the accents give great character to the play, they also, at times, obscure when is being said. And though one can't blame it on the actors (on the contrary, there were strong performances by all of the principals), the play is extremely static; there just isn't enough action on stage. Indeed, this production might have worked just as well on radio, in which case the audience would be spared the unimaginative series of blackouts which punctuated scenes on the overlit TFT stage.

Weathermen chilled by shoddy production

The Weathermen
WX

By DAVID R. BINSTAD

The Weathermen (not to be confused with the Weathermen of *Poison* fame) are a Guelph-based rock band with solid goals. Unfortunately, the band's latest independently-released album, *WX*, is unlikely to provide the key for future success.

WX is lyrically sound, and at times evocative, but when lead singer Seth Matson sings on side one, "it doesn't get any better than this," one is tempted to thank him for the early warning.

The Weathermen's main problem

is one which is shared by many local independent outfits: the lack of professional production. Ironically, Fyl Bennet of Toronto's Reaction Studios produced six of the eight tracks, but the final product is stylistically ill-defined and the songs have a distracting, unpolished sound.

There are, nevertheless, some highlights, most notably "Cactus," a melodic story of ill-fated lovers, and "Element of Truth," a discussion of the effect World War Two has had on contemporary society. These two tracks toe the line, and give evidence of a potential the band has yet to fully tap.

The Weathermen have played two dates at Toronto's Silver Dollar to promote the album, which is available exclusively at the Record Peddler.

CHOICE · CRACKS

A friend, on visiting W.C. Fields on his deathbed and finding him thumbing through a Bible, exclaimed "Bill, I've never known you to read the Bible." "Just looking for loopholes," Fields replied.



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