

First of the season

# Artichoke ripe for viewing at the Tarragon



Les Carlson as Walter and Marie Romain Aloma as Lily-Agnes.

by **BOB POMERANTZ**  
 Question: What is witty, wacky, features a water witch and is great in salads? The answer: Artichoke, the season opener at the Tarragon Theatre.  
 To understand how the play gets its name a brief summary of the plot must be given. The scene is set on the Saskatchewan prairie, where Walter and Margaret Morley, a simple farm couple, live and work the land with their daughter Lily-Agnes and Grandpa

Ferguson. The atmosphere in the household can only be described as hostile, with Margaret and Walter constantly bickering.

Into the scene steps Gibson McFarland, a highly educated, overly witty, old flame of Margaret's who has come to spend the summer. The result is a rekindling of feelings between Gibson and Mrs. Morley. She decides that Gibson is far superior to Walter, who seems to spend his whole life doing nothing but "putting it in and taking it out-the wheat crop that is."

In any case, the local farmers, in assessing the situation at the Morley's place, refer to Gibson as the Artichoke, a rare fruit with a mysterious heart, while all the common farm folks are merely "turnips" by comparison.

The production is successful, firstly because of a superb script by Joanna Glass, a native of Saskatchewan who captures the essence of the prairie experience in her work. The result is a successful harvest of well ripened characters, each one refreshing and unique.

Artichoke is also successful because of the prowess of the players. Marie Romain Aloma is superlative as the fidgety Lily-Agnes who is so tense that she won't take off her hat for fear that her insides will drift away.

Aloma makes the role come alive by capturing the whole Lily-Agnes, not only delivering her lines believably, but complementing the language with wholly convincing facial expressions, gait and tone of voice.

Hagan Beggs displays total concentration in playing Gibson. This results in a character who comes across as a hilarious eccentric. He never becomes a mere caricature, which could easily have been the case had a less talented actor taken the role.

Everyone else performs competently except for one true disappointment. Patricia Hamilton, who appears as Margaret, could easily have been the star of the show as she acts brilliantly in certain scenes of the play. However, near the play's end, her concentration appeared to diminish rapidly to the point where

she seemed ready to break into laughter while she delivered her final lines.

Bill Glassco's direction is a work of art. The focus of the play, the growing tension in the Morley household never falters. The cast works as a true team, creating an atmosphere combining spiritual isolation and physical crowding, and revving up into a powder keg of emotion.

The set consists of a plain but homey kitchen and parlour, lying adjacent to another farm house kitchen, which is set slightly farther upstage. The two are separated by a realistic backdrop of prairie wheatfields. By isolating one farmhouse interior from another by the use of the backdrop and clever lighting techniques, two conflicting feelings of isolation and congestion are ingeniously combined.

The device of the two neighbors as narrators works well, not only for delineation of the plot, but also as a contribution of wry humour to a pathetic situation. On the whole the audience savoured the bitter-sweet flavour of the Artichoke.

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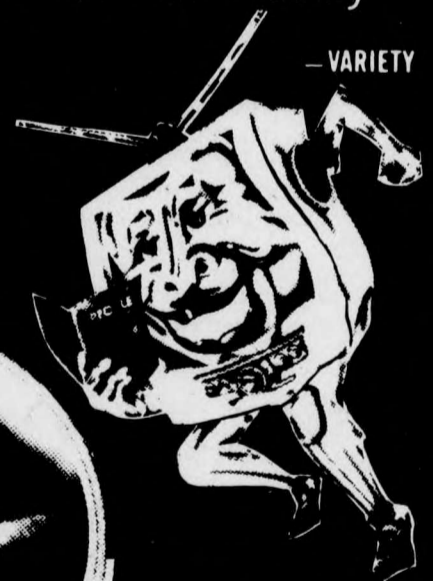
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