

or why TOM WOOD thinks all actors are transsexual.

manipulated. I love entertaining people, but the best thing you can do is to make people think. That's what theatre should do — make people think.

Torch Song Trilogy!

There are no villains in *Torch Song Trilogy*. There are all kinds of confrontation, but no one is wrong. It's filled with so much love. That's why the play is so popular. It's not a militant gay rights play. It's pro-gay, but more than that, it's pro-humanity. That can't be denied by anyone, no matter how unliberated they are.

The Future!

I'm writing a second play and I'll be finishing it after *Torch Song Trilogy*.

It's a musical comedy with a very serious undercurrent. It's about the way that films have shaped our thoughts.

B-Movie would be part of a trilogy, an idea I have in the back of my head. NSL would have been the first, about T.V., then *B-Movie* and the third would be about the theatre.

B-Movie is about images, and what we are told is sexually attractive. It's about a young man in Vancouver who can't see anything but film images — he lives in a movie.

The Theatre!

I've done T.V., but not film. I spent 14 years in the professional theatre and I've never been out of work. To do film means taking a year off and really lobbying and you have to live in Toronto. But I hope to write a screenplay one day. I find film fascinating.

I am tempted to move to New York. I get disillusioned about Canadian theatre. I was listening to CBC this morning and they said almost 30 arts organizations went belly-up this year. The ones left tend to be large museums. But all of a sudden, something like the Phoenix will pop up. I have lots of friends in New York and most of them are unemployed. I'm no fool; I could starve to death in New York easily. But I may move down eventually and I might get an agent in New York.

I've never felt artistically restricted in Canada, but whenever I do, I just write it! There's a frame of mind in certain artists who feel restricted. But I feel you have to do it yourself. The Phoenix has opened this downtown space which they rent out for next to nothing. I'm really sorry I've missed the Fringe festival all three times. I hear it's really exciting and there's so much to see.

I was the associate director of the Vancouver Playhouse, Vancouver's answer to the Citadel, for two years. But it's very unexciting and dull these days. There's been nothing going on there in the last two years.

In Winnipeg, there's one major theatre, but it's like the Citadel.

In Toronto, there's not that much good theatre. It takes itself so seriously. Nothing exists outside of Toronto. In three months you'll read about the Canadian premiere of *Torch Song Trilogy* being there. There's one English-speaking theatre in Montreal, but it's got a very up and down repertoire.

Normally, the smaller theatres make a go of it for a few years then they collapse.

The Phoenix does important, exciting, dangerous work. There's a place for the Phoenix in this town.

I've worked at the Citadel but I won't work there anymore. I don't feel artistically limited because I'm willing to not work for the salary at the Citadel, but I come to the Phoenix for this salary to do what I want to do. I'm willing to give up the Citadel's salary to get a chance to get right in there to exercise my muscles.

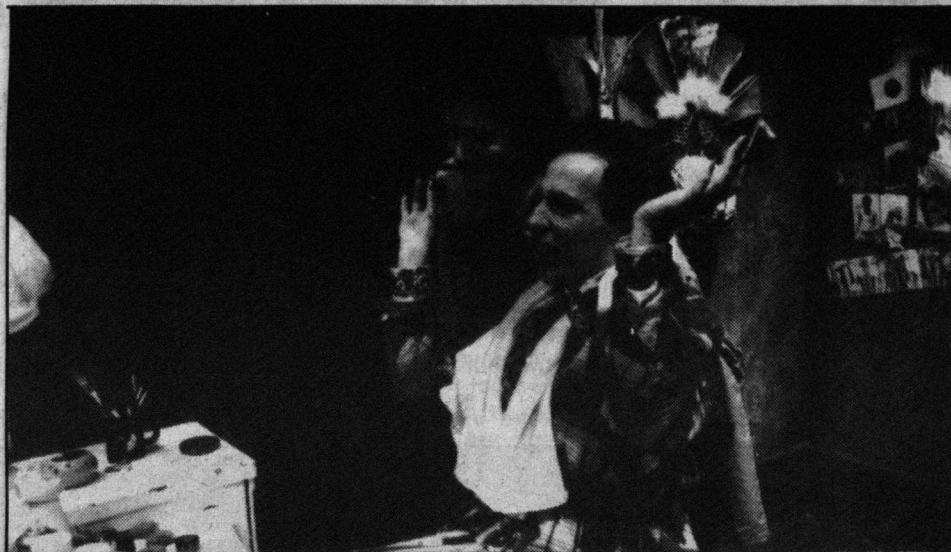


photo Alex Miller

Arnold (Tom Wood) is Ed's (David McLlraith) brother, lover, confessor and mother all rolled into one.

Torch Song Trilogy Phoenix Theatre through Feb. 17

review by Olga Jagodnik

When was the last time you saw something you wanted everyone you knew in the world to go and see?

Harvey Fierstein's 1983 Tony Award Best Play, *Torch Song Trilogy* is such a play, premiering in Canada at the Phoenix Theatre. Beginning its career Off-Off Broadway, then going to Off-Broadway, *Torch Song* had a three-year smash run on Broadway. It's easy to see why.

It's a comic story of what life is like being a gay looking for love, or in the case of Ed, played by David McLlraith, trying to decide whether to come out of the closet.

Torch Song is a hit on its own merit, true enough, but it could have been dead meat on the stage had it not been for the incredible performance of Tom Wood as Arnold. This man is a phenomenon. What more can I say about a guy who makes you feel like he's your brother, your lover, your confessor, your mother all rolled into one? Unfortunately, he has all the answers, and that suspiciously resembles Pope John Paul II, so watch out. You begin to believe everything. But in this case, it seems to be O.K. because Arnold is liberal in everything.

The play begins with Arnold sitting in front of his—her dressing table, making up before he goes on stage in drag. He begins by telling us that he thinks his biggest problem is "being young and beautiful," but that at one

time he is either young, or beautiful, and "never the twain have met." He wants an "international stud: the more you put in, the more you get out—one size fits all." And up he gets from the table, throws off his dressing gown and reveals his striking gold-silver lame gown with matching headdress. I haven't looked that fetching since... well, I don't think I've ever looked that fetching!

Next we see Ed talking to someone across the room about how gorgeous 'her' baby blue eyes are and would she care to go out in his car somewhere? Overhead is a sign reading "International Stud." Of course. Ed talks about his life as a schoolteacher across the river; he comes over to this side to get away and be unrecognized.

Five months later, Arnold, very much in love with and in doubt of Ed, calls him up and wants to know why he hasn't heard from Ed for the last week. Ed slips up and has to tell Arnold that he's expecting someone for dinner—a woman. Arnold quips, "and how long has this been going on?"

End of the relationship temporarily, and enter Laurel. Played by Martha Burns, Laurel is pretty but not very witty, when compared to Arnold. It's hard to understand how Ed could have been so swayed. Anyway, Martha Burns is adequate in the role, but does not strike any deep chords, or haunt with tragic flaw, not anything. Well, being pretty is just as necessary to the story as being smart—but given a choice, take your choice.

Things really get steamy when mother enters the picture. Arnold's Jewish Mother. Of course. You know what that means—

Jewish mothers are brilliantly witty, and have answers for everything.

Shirley Douglas as both mother and Lady Blues who gives resounding renditions of "Crazy in Love, Stormy Weather, Love You So," and toerh between segments of Arnold and Ed and Laurel, is terrific and memorable. The singing is so-so but as mother, she's yours, mine and ours all rolled together. You've heard it too, it goes something like this: "So this is what you've invited me here for—to insult me and spit on your father's grave!" Poor Arnold.

The most hilarious thing of the evening has got to be the "bunny theme" on the final set in the act. Bunny wallpaper, dishes, salt and pepper shakers, wall ceramics, sofa cushions, Arnold's and mother's life-size bunny slippers, and just when you give up counting, the teapot, the bathroom poster saying that "nothing succeeds like excess." It's insane and insanely funny.

Don't forget though: this is a serious play. We are brought back abruptly to that unavoidable issue of what it's like to give up being 'normal' for the life of a homosexual. Arnold's plea to his mother to try and understand how he's always felt about being gay is poignant and touching. But not melodramatic. He ends his plea by telling his mother that "if you can't respect me, you have no place in my life."

There's much, much more to say for *Torch Song* than space or imagination allows, believe me.

This is one performance you CANNOT allow yourself to miss.

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