

# Studio Theatre's brightest stars

feature by Karen Redford

As a *studio* theatre, Studio Theatre was originally conceived of as a working place — a place where students could experiment with and perfect the skills that they were learning about theatre art in their classes. In many ways, Studio Theatre still fulfills that function, but since the initiation of professional programs in acting, directing, playwriting and design at the U of A, Studio Theatre has become a showcase for these students.

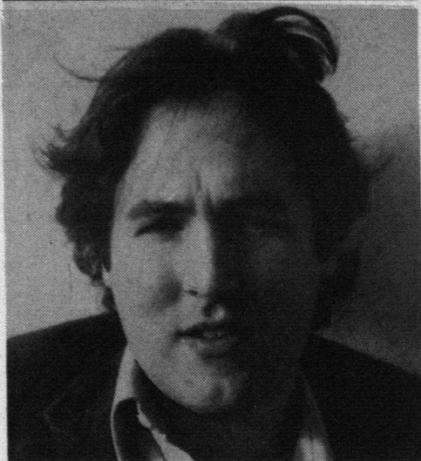
There are fifteen students accepted into the B.F.A. (Acting) program each year — five women and ten men — of these, many do not finish the four-year program, which is completed by three productions at Studio Theatre in the final year. Two directing students are accepted into the M.F.A. (Directing) program each year, and at the end of two years of study, they direct a thesis production at Studio Theatre. This year's season has been and continues to be an exciting part of the Edmonton theatre scene.

wants to get away in this production from the stage trickery that he used in the earlier show. "I want to do a simple, clean, clear production. I'll just tell the story, and the moments should come out of that." Ben has spent several years honing his directing skills. At Trent University in Peterborough, Ont. he was program director for the campus radio, ran the university theatre group, and co-founded *Magic Circus Theatre* — as well as founding *City Stage Theatre*, the first professional winter theatre in Peterborough. It was such a success that Ben was able to return there last summer to direct two plays — *Alice Among the Christians*, and *Saturday Night Special* by Alberta playwright Conni Massing.

Canadian plays sponsored by *Theatre Ontario* and in the Sears Drama Festival.

In *Buried Child* Shepard takes American mythology and warps it with his perverse sense of reality. "It cuts to the bone. Nothing Shepard does is wish-washy, so nothing I do can be wishy-washy either. I have to have strength and purpose, and that'll push me."

*Best of Stitches*, — both at Centaur I. Ruth came to the U of A to do an M.F.A. in Design.



**Ben Henderson**  
M.F.A. (Directing)  
*The Tempest*  
from Winnipeg

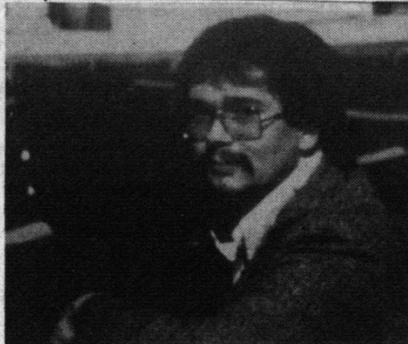
"I confess it. I have done *The Tempest* before. This time, though, I think I know the pitfalls." Ben sees theatre as a process of clarification and communication; and



**Sherry Wells**  
M.F.A. (Directing)  
*Buried Child*  
from Etobicoke, Ontario

Sherry's career got off to a rousing start in Grade 7 when she auditioned for *The Mikado*. She did not get a part; but ended up doing everything else — sets, costumes, make-up and programs. She sang all the songs by heart while washing the dishes.

At the University of Western Ontario she took Honours English and Drama, and eventually taught theatre arts in Guelph, Ontario. She developed an interest in directing, and besides directing school productions was involved semi-professionally in productions of new



**Morris Ertman**  
M.F.A. (Design)  
*Saturday, Sunday Monday*  
(Set, Costume & Lighting Design)  
*Marat/Sade* (Lighting Design)

Morris Ertman's theatrical interests began in small-town Alberta when a friend introduced him to the high school drama club instead of taking him to the cafeteria. Since then, he has been practicing his theatrical antics everywhere from the pulpit to the stage. After a four year study in theology, Morris made the decision to enter the world of the professional theatre. He subsequently enrolled in the B.A. (Theatre Studies) program at the U of A with the intention of eventually studying directing. Somewhere on the vast list of recommended courses, Morris discovered theatre design and the next year entered the M.F.A. design program. Since then, he has been involved in various and sundry activities including the establishment of a company called *Rose Theatre*, who, last summer toured parks, churches and community halls with *The Pilgrim's Progress* and *Images*.



**Barb Devonshire**  
B.F.A. (Design)  
set *Marat/Sade*  
from Edmonton

Barb feels she's been making sets all her life. As a child she collected puppets and had a mechanized puppet box, with which she was always creating shows, and making scenery. When she had to pick a career, she was advised to try theatre design, because it combined elements of so many of the arts.

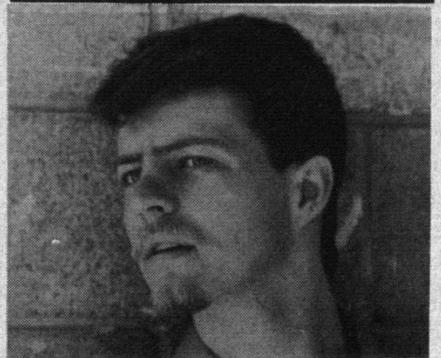
Besides in-house productions, Barb has designed two shows for Stage West this winter, including the current *Not Now, Darling!* Last summer she worked on banners for *Universiade* and designed the banners now seen in HUB mall.

I think mutual respect among everyone working on a show — the actors, directors, technical people, and designers — is really important. The great thing about theatre is everyone working together."

**Ruth Lysak-Martynkiw**  
M.F.A. (Design)

Born and raised as a Ukrainian-Canadian in Montreal, Quebec, as a child Ruth was involved in various cultural activities including music, Ukrainian dancing, and PLAST (Ukrainian scouting organization). While in high school she became actively involved in the technical aspects of theatre productions. Attended Vanier College C.E.G.E.P. (Montreal) where she was on the executive of the Student Theatre Association.

Ruth attained a B.F.A. in Theatre, specialization in Scenography at Concordia University in Montreal. While at Concordia, she designed lighting for shows such as *Equus*, *Tango*, *Intersection*, *Collection Creatif*, as well as operating lights for many other designers. She also did freelance lighting designs for *Uncle Vanya* and *The*

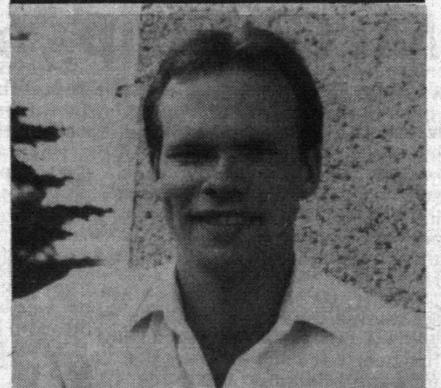


**Jasper von Meerheimb**  
M.F.A. (Design)  
Costumes - *Twelfth Night*  
Set, costumes, lighting - *Buried Child*

Jasper's interest in design goes back to childhood when he wanted to go into architecture

He spent two years working on a B.F.A. in art and design at the U of A, then entered a professional dance program at *Les Grands Ballets Canadiens* and *Les Ballets Jazz* in Montreal.

A lack of individual input expected of him as a dancer led him to center his focus on his job as assistant art director of *Elan Image*, a fashion trade magazine, and as free-lance photographer in the Montreal fashion community. He returned to the U of A after his two-year sojourn to finish his undergraduate studies, then entered into the M.F.A. program in theatre design. In *Twelfth Night* Jasper has tried to create a sense of Illyria as a land stopped in time with the costumes — a combination of fantasy and antiquity: the Illyrians are in darker shades with emphasis on golds and metals, while the foreigners, who are the catalysts of the action, are in more exotic colour combinations.



**Steve Atkinson**  
B.F.A. (Acting)  
*Sir Toby Belch*  
from Calgary

Steve made his acting debut in a Grade 7 production of *Jesus Christ Superstar*, in which the teacher turned on a tape, and everyone mouthed the lyrics.

He studied theatre arts at Mount Royal College for two years, and started two companies — *The Young Shakespearians*, and the *Royal Roaches*, the first theatre company to beat *Loose Moose* at theatre sports. This love of improvisational theatre has stayed with him, and last summer he organized *A Street Theatre* to do clowning, music, and skits on the streets of Edmonton to promote *Universiade*. He has taught improv and would like to direct that kind of theatre.

He has all the talents to make *Sir Toby Belch* come alive. "He's a big, fat, lusty bum, whom everyone is trying to amend; but he doesn't want to be amended."



**Grant Carmichael**  
B.F.A. (Acting)  
*Feste*  
from Edmonton

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