

Entertainment

Last Man on the town

by Suzanne Lundrigan

Shain Jaffe equals dynamo.

As a former head of programming for C Channel, Canada's pay TV Network dedicated to the performing Arts, executive director of the Toronto Theatre Festival and Controller of Saturday Night magazine, Jaffe has made his contribution to the Arts in Canada.

Jaffe is wearing his producer's shoes in Edmonton.

As president and executive director of Video Cabaret, he's in town to watch over the Phoenix's production of the *Last Man on Earth*. "I smoke cigarettes, drink coffee, and pace a lot," chuckles Jaffe.

"In theatre the producer is the facilitator as well as the person who assumes the final responsibility for the finished product. I strive to establish an environment where the artist can work. It takes a mixture of cash management and street smarts."

Jaffe stands up, "Do you have a light?" Energy is the name of the game here.

The producer is also very much a go between according to Jaffe, "Sometimes the artist's vision is so clear, but there is a gap between what the artist hopes to communicate and what the audience actually sees. As the production is being put together, I play the role of audience eye."

Working with the artist and saying no to an artist generates a lot of "positive friction. In fact, the best relationships I've had with artists have happened when I've said no. It all depends on the maturity of the artist," explains Jaffe.

As Jaffe has worked as a writer, director, and actor, he doubtless brings a certain sensitivity to his role as producer.

He speaks with reverence of the profession of writer, "I ran the gamut of poetry and plays, but I wasn't a writer. I think there is a certain personality, a thirst for knowledge and set of priorities held by writers. I didn't have those. I knew too many writer friends and I didn't want to diminish that writer label by calling myself a writer."

Jaffe arrived in Canada in 1969, "a very good year." That was the year Jaffe deserted the American army. "I came to Canada and tried to learn as much about this country as I could. I set out in a white Cadillac Eldorado which I gave to someone." Jaffe completed the trek hitchhiking. "I made it from Cape Breton to Wreck Bay."

Video Cabaret, Jaffe's current pet project, is a theatre company known for its bizarre and eclectic theatre forms. The company works at integrating theatre and video. Past feats include running for mayor. "The

Hummer sisters, political activists from Toronto, developed a persona and had said persona run for mayor. They got their names on the ballot as A Hummer and garnered 12,000 votes running second behind Art Eggleton."

Out of this tradition came the current production, *The Last Man on Earth*.

"This idea is now in its fourth rebirth. Alan Bridle started four years ago with the metaphor of being the "last man on earth." This man is lonely so he creates characters to talk to. Bridle would put a wig on and do a schtick. There was no beginning, middle or end."

Video was introduced to the production and resulted in the final product currently playing in Edmonton. "The bomb has dropped and a man is left all alone. He finds a television studio and starts making tapes of characters... for company. Suddenly, some of the characters start misbehaving and disobeying their creator. Our hero is left with a dilemma."

Jaffe ventured a further explanation of the play, "Some people will simply see it as a story line, others may see a metaphor for the artist and his creation. Sometimes in the process of creating, the artist becomes consumed by his creation and it threatens his very existence," Jaffe shrugs, allowing the audience to choose.

"I'm nervous. Never done a show in Edmonton. I'm nervous about all openings." Later he returns to explain that nervous may not be the appropriate word.

Jaffe sits back and reflects on the arts versus free trade. "When the correct conditions exist, Canada will be ready to compete on the free trade market. Canadian arts have to learn about working in a market situation. Right now, we have no way of acknowledging or remunerating success in the arts. Until we learn to deal with market, we have far more to lose than we have to gain. It would be like a pre-teen going to war with someone in middle age."

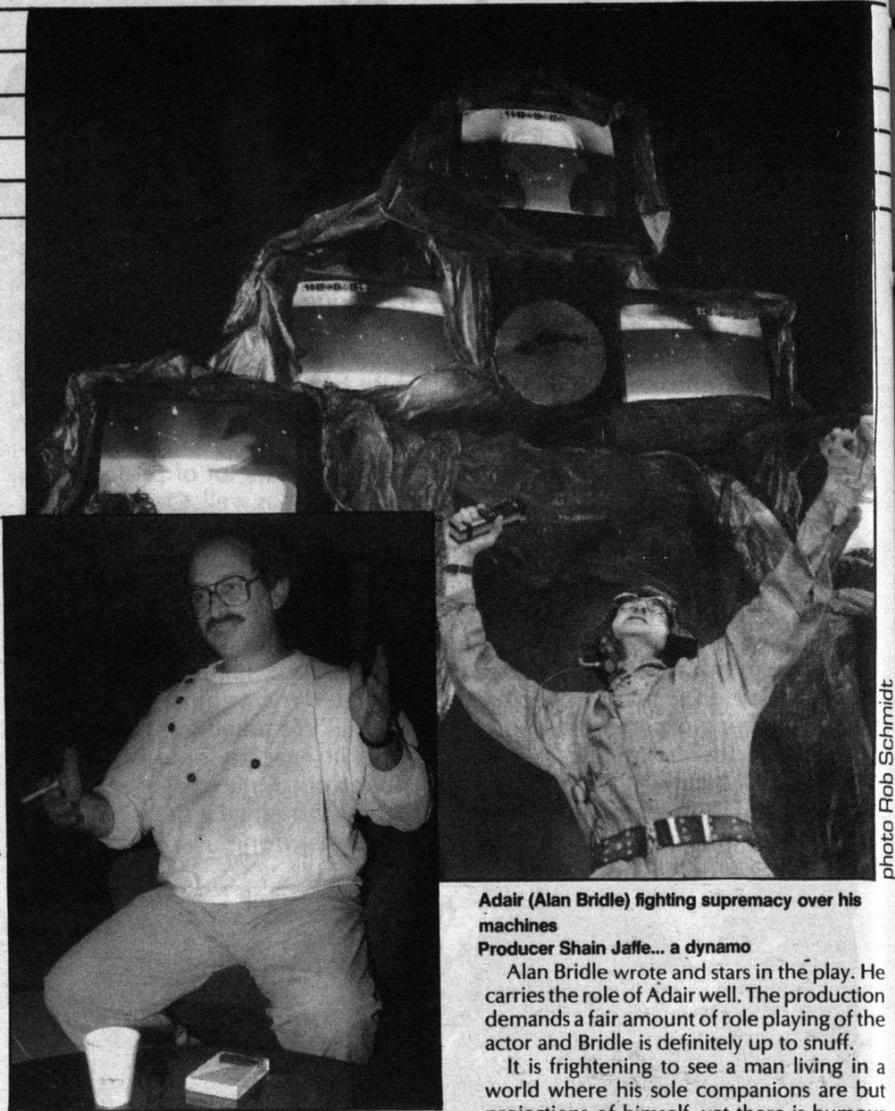
"Canadian content right now is hued CBC grey or news. True, there are exceptions which we can get excited about. We're not ready to compete culturally... and there is no game unless you can win."

Last Man on Earth
Phoenix Theatre/Video Cabaret
til October 26

review by Suzanne Lundrigan

The bomb has dropped. Adair is the only man left on earth. He is a very lonely man.

Fortunately, he has discovered a television studio. There he sets about peopling his



Adair (Alan Bridle) fighting supremacy over his machines

Producer Shain Jaffe... a dynamo

Alan Bridle wrote and stars in the play. He carries the role of Adair well. The production demands a fair amount of role playing of the actor and Bridle is definitely up to snuff.

It is frightening to see a man living in a world where his sole companions are but projections of himself, yet there is humour inherent to this premise.

Imagine a man dressed alternately: a) in drag, complete with a French accent; b) punk rock garb; c) moustachioed glory... and each of these images involved in conversations with one another. The stark loneliness of a world where one truly has to create in one's own image in order to have friends is undercut, the very visual humour of one face appearing in all sorts of incongruous costumes and wigs... and talking to one another.

Occasionally, though, Bridle gives into the temptation to flog the audience over the head with this premise. Thus, he crowds the stage with so many personas at once, saying all sorts of things at the same time. In short, the message is lost in the medium.

The most powerful points of this play occur when Adair is involved in one to one conversation with a creation. When Adair is enjoying a candlelit dinner with his beloved Toby, the audience is allowed to catch the very bitter irony which colours the existence portrayed on the stage.

The set is great... definitely post-nuclear holocaust decor. The fine touches make it even better. In one scene Adair makes bread and walks out on stage with the loaf. Realism lends to the tragic horror being expressed.

The *Last Man's* message is a poignant and significant one... though, at times, it is muddled in a morass of characters and dialogue. Nevertheless, the Phoenix and Video Cabaret are deserving of kudos for their daring to explore new and exciting realms of theatre. See it.

world. He creates people to talk to by video, taping himself in a variety of costumes and wigs. His imagination alone limits the scope of his creations. Thus, he has a lisping, French-accented mistress named Toby, carping parents named Norton and Christine, and a five-monitor named Jason with whom he can visit, take afternoon tea or dine over candle light.

Technology, as Adair explains, is "what you need to keep body and soul together..." However, Adair's host of video companions seem bent on rending his soul in multiple pieces as Jason has decided that it is he and not the human, Adair, who should be in charge. The creations are challenging creator... an oft-repeated theme in human existence. Children rebel against parents, art consumes artist, and the id sometimes breaks away from the super ego resulting in madness.

As Adair struggles with the insurrection before him, we witness all of these battles.

In a telling moment, Christine, Adair's mother figure, screams, "I made you!" to which Adair screams back, "No, I made YOU!"

Video Cabaret is an innovative theatre company based in Toronto which has been working to meld the media of video and theatre.

The Last Man on Earth is a child of this marriage. During this production there is a single human presence on stage... the other characters are on video... a chilling thought for all technophobes.

And the Liszt of quality goes on at symphony

by Juanita Spears

Those present at the ESO concert this past Oct. 10 and 11 were reminded that, indeed, they have much to be thankful.

Although the choice of programming wasn't exactly this writer's 'cup of tea', it had, nonetheless, the international flavour they had intended.

Oct. 1st was International Music Day and so the ESO dedicated this past weekend's performance in recognition of this widely celebrated day by featuring works by Liszt, Glick (Canadian contemporary), and Vaughan Williams.

The first half of the program belonged to the guest soloist, Tamas Vasary. He performed two continuous movement works by Liszt, the first of which was "Hungarian Fantasy", written for piano and chamber orchestra.

As its name suggests, it is a work dedicated to Hungarian folk music with all the charm and bravado one would expect. Tamas Vasary, in his quiet manner, demonstrated

wonderfully the brilliant, fluid piano style of the work.

Next on the 'menu' was definitely the evening's 'piece de resistance.'

Liszt's "Piano Concerto No. 2 in A major" was first written in 1849, revised at least thrice, received its first performance in 1857, and then later revised by the composer for the last time in 1961.

The Concerto is a continuous movement work though it has many fluctuations of tempo and is further unified by one basic theme which permeates the work in many transformations.

The dreamy, sensuous melody announced immediately in the opening bar by the clarinets is supported by typically Lisztian chromatic harmonies in the other woodwinds.

The melody is passed from piano to orchestra to piano and is characterized by many beautiful and forceful solos handled masterfully by the ESO principal players.

Vasary was brilliant. And he deservedly

received three curtain calls from a very appreciative audience.

The second half of the program was less successful. I salute Uri Mayer and the ESO for their continuous promotion of twentieth century music and, in particular, Canadian contemporary music for I too am an ardent crusader of the cause. But regrettably, the performance of Glick's "A Gathering In — A Concept for Orchestra", written in 1969, was tedious and cliché — in a word — a 'yawner'. Actually, the elderly couple seated ahead of me summed it up beautifully, "Well, that wasn't too offensive — you could at least sleep through it."

In fact, had Mayer not made a hasty return to the stage, the applause would have faded into a piteous silence. For once I agreed with the reaction of an Edmonton audience to a contemporary work.

The evening concluded with Vaughan Williams' Symphony No. 2 in G major. This work premiered in Queen's Hall in 1914 and was a resounding success. However, the

composer was not quite happy with it and it went through many revisions, cuts, with large sections being rewritten. The last revised edition was published around 1936.

The work is very romantic and very nationalistic. And it is a credit to V.W. genius that it has not only survived, but is still played today when present tastes (particularly in the 50's) tend to rebuff such blatant outpourings of emotion.

Vaughan Williams lovers, forgive me, but I can't help envisioning Walt Disney movies when I listen to such music. But I must also confess that it is among some of the most enjoyable literature to play.

Having said all that, the ESO did itself credit in this performance. It was a tight, precise, and very enjoyable evening of music with only a few moments of suspect in tuning and timing.

But by far the evening's performance reminded the audience of the great strides the symphony has made in just a few short years.