

ENTERTAINMENT

York's Hair for today

The hit of the sixties is still relevant in 1982

Laurie Kruk

York Independent Theatre Productions have been working since last May to put together their first show, the rock musical *HAIR*: a big, emotion-charged production incorporating music, dance and drama, and an enterprise seen by general manager Douglas Ross as "a test". Y.I.T.P. has financed *HAIR* with donations from the colleges and other sources, and is staffed entirely by volunteers. To put together such an ambitious revival with only the resources that the York community can provide has proven to be a real challenge. But it is also a rewarding one, according to all those involved, and a positive and exciting one. Working with the all-student cast has been a professional director, Gregory Peterson. Peterson has an impressive list of successes behind him, assisting at Stratford on *Twelfth Night*, *Much Ado About Nothing* and *The Importance of Being Earnest*, as well as co-directing *The Beggar's Opera* with Robin Phillips. Calling the Stratford Festival a "fantasy factory, encompassing the absolute best in every field", Peterson still has genuine admiration for the students involved in *HAIR*.

"Most of the students I'm directing — in drama, and some business

majors — are more talented than the actors I've been working with at Toronto Truck Theatre, or in Montreal. This is a really educational process for everyone, and a nostalgic one for me, because I grew up in the 60s."

Peterson adds, "Of course, hippies were mainly a New York phenomenon. We were once removed from what was happening there; what we got in Canada was a pale shadow of the actual movement. But it was still a very exciting time."

As for timeliness, "People ask if *HAIR*, in 1982, is relevant anymore. I say yes, maybe even more so than ever before. You see how the peace groups are growing, especially in Europe: there's a resurgence of public nudity, and the hair, again, the long hair. We've got another angry generation cropping up — it retraced, or regressed into the 'Me' generation for a while, but it came back. And this is what *HAIR* says, that we've got to come back together again. For the problems raised by the play are still there, and more."

"There is so much talent here. The ingenuity behind this show is quite extraordinary — the stage is made from a junk-pile! Stage manager Ann Skinner is doing a tremendous job. As you know, there is music

throughout *HAIR* — almost fifty songs. The cast sings and dances; there is a small rock band supplying the music. It's really an exhausting performance! Glenn Morley is the musical director, and he's professional. But the choreographer, Richard Garbig, is fresh from York. They've done a fine job. The lighting director is very up-and-coming, too."

"But most important is the feeling behind the mechanics. The cast is very enthusiastic, and not self-conscious at all. We have a wonderful dramaturge, Bronwen Weaver, who filled us all in on the events and trends of the 60s. It was an incredibly active time, with incredible tension. The hippies grew out of that."

"Yes, there are scenes in *HAIR* that are designed to shock. I'd be happy if you walked out in the middle of it, as long as you told me why. *HAIR* deals with the topics that we still haven't accepted in all totality — sex, as opposed to love, and the use of drugs. *HAIR* tries to distinguish between sex and love. The hippies explored these myths — myths about sex and drugs — to show Americans that they were hung up sexually. While I'm stressing the sexuality of the play, I'm not making a big issue out of it. *HAIR* says that it's more important to love than to copulate."

Hair pullers.



"The question of nudity astounds me. But then, Canadians are less liberal than Americans, after all. What I'm doing is relatively conservative; I'm not out to gross anyone out. There's no embarrassment on the part of the cast — the nudity is optional; maybe everyone will, maybe no one will. It's not necessary. I don't believe in sensationalism in the theatre."

"There's a drug element in *HAIR* as well, but it isn't pushed at the audience, I don't think. It tries to break down people's fear of drugs, their automatic prejudice, but the audience has to draw their own conclusions. My job as director is to ask the question 'why?' of the actors — they ask 'how?'. The

audience thinks of the answers."

"And though *HAIR* is against the establishment in every form: like most good theatre, it has a Christian backbone, and a Christ-figure as well. *HAIR* speaks for change. And the hippies weren't all idealistic and free-minded. The play lets you see that negative aspect of 'hippiedom' too. But the audience is meant to understand them, and what motivates them. And when you understand someone, you can't hate."

HAIR will run from January 26-30, in Burton Auditorium at 8 p.m. Matinee on Friday, January 29 at 2 p.m. Tickets are \$4.00, \$3.00 for students. For ticket information call 667-3627.

Les Ballet Jazz entertains



Le Ballet Jazz has everything for dance students and novices alike.

J. Brett Abbey
Al Locke

Les Ballet Jazz, the internationally renowned Canadian dance company, opened their Toronto stanza to an enthusiastic Ryerson Theatre crowd on Tuesday night.

Divided into four segments, the hundred-odd-minute show was a combination of new and old; power and grace. *Etudes en Jazz*, their first piece, began simply and built to a crescendo which featured eight dancers in bowler hats and long white gloves. The dancers' gloves gave

the effect of huge hands circling impossibly in their sockets. The brilliant lighting and precision movements of the dancers made this piece one of the evening's highlights.

La Machine, a new piece by Darryl Gray, presents the automatic fluidity and grace of a machine. Each dancer, devoid of expression, plays a moving part and gesticulates monotonously on the stage. Once the "machine" is assembled, the dancers, in harmony, "run to the music".

The final number, *La Perfectly Swell*, is a holdover from previous years and left the audience happy. It is a piece that one becomes involved in — you can't help clapping along to the jazzy rhythm.

In total, Les Ballet Jazz has everything that is technically pleasing to dance students, and is entertaining to those who previously were not.

Some tickets are still available for the show which runs until January 23 at the Ryerson Theatre. Call 595-5088.

Epstein revives forgotten Poland

Elliot Lefko

The Poland of today's shambled solidarity is not the Poland that Stephen Epstein dreams about. A Toronto photographer, Epstein travelled to Poland in 1980 to capture in black and white photos the remnants of its Jewish culture. His work is on display in stunning vividness until February 4, at Photo 44, 109 Niagara Street.

"As a second-generation Jew, I was very interested in Eastern Europe," says Epstein, a 26-year-old OCA graduate, explaining his interest. "I knew that what was still there, wouldn't be there in the future."

hadn't seen any pictures from there since '38."

Epstein's people have sullen faces, but they're not depressed. Similarly, there's a certain dignity to the framed, overrun cemeteries, and gutted synagogue that had burned down in 1968. It may not be much, suggests Epstein's pictures, but after them there is nothing else. And if his pictures can preserve some of Jewish Poland then the culture will never die.

Epstein points out that the reason the Polish government has made monuments out of the concentration camps is not out memory to the Jews who

perished in camps but rather as a reminder to the Polish people of how bad things had once been.

Jerusalem in the Fall

Epstein is trying to organize a tour of community centres and schools in North America and plans for the thirty-piece show include a run at the Yeshiva University in Jerusalem in the Fall.

Epstein says he'd love to return to Poland once more. "When you're there, you can't wait to get out. But I'd like to go back, and get enough photos for a book."

Nothing had changed

Epstein concentrated on shooting Jewish cemeteries, people, synagogues, Jewish community centres, as well as concentration camp scenes. Sometimes he would arrive at a place which he had seen in pictures by other photographers. "An American, Roman Vyshniac, wanted to photograph the old Jews before they disappeared," says Epstein. "He had a famous shot of a courtyard, that I reshot, and nothing had changed. I went to New York and showed him my photo and he starting crying. He



One of Stephen Epstein's haunting photos of Poland.

Stay far away from The Passing Scene

PJ Todd

Have you ever wondered what an actor might do if suddenly caught in the middle of a play's big scene with a hacking cough? One that can't be quelled with big swallows and furtive throat clearing? Had you been at the Tarragon Theatre, Saturday, watching Erka Ritter's new play, *The Passing Scene*, you could have seen one actress handle an untimely attack of "tickle throat".

Nancy Beatty began coughing and was forced, after delivering five or six muffled lines, to break from her role as Kitty Frank, "soft" journalist, and make her excuses. The house lights came up and we spent the only tolerable ten minutes of the performance waiting for the play to resume.

It is a sad day when the highlight of a play is its intermission or, as in this case — its interruption; but such is the reality of Ritter's latest attempt at stagecrafting. To quickly pinpoint the defects of this play is an onerous chore, because *The Passing Scene* fumbles at every step. In so many ways, that one is overwhelmed with its failure.

Ritter's script is a slick catalogue of one-liners that lead nowhere; rarely to laughter and certainly not to a play. We meet Kitty and Dan in the well-worn and seedy 'pick-up' scenario: she's the frigid bitch and he's a guffawing oaf. The play is concerned with their 'relationship'; and a relationship between these two lovers is about as interesting as a dish of milk-toast.

Ritter's inability to develop character — Kitty, for example,

Cold, cold Kitty

remains as cold and inaccessible as she was from the first moment of the first act — leaves this play without substance or meaning. Her constraining one-liners force the actors into a mincing, clipped delivery that makes them all sound like first night stand-up comedians grappling for exposure.

What might have been a battle of the wits is just a snivelling fracas in which each actor takes turns stabbing himself with a blunt knife.

If anything, Ritter proves that there is something worse than nagging, and that's *quippping*.