

Entertainment

It all started from a medical mistake

Montanaro mixes media with dance

interview by **Dragos Ruiu**

Michael Montanaro is a dancer because his parents once thought he was epileptic. "It all started from a medical mistake!" the thin, tall dancer tells with a smile.

"My parents started me in tap dancing lessons when I was three because they mistakenly thought I might be epileptic. They assumed that I could hold a full time job teaching dancing even if I was epileptic." From that mistake was born a passion for rhythm and movement.

"Musical theatre was my first love. From there I went to dancing. I went from New York, to Boston, and then to Montreal." In Montreal, Michael danced with and became artistic director of Le Grupe de la Place Royale. Eventually, he formed his own troupe. His troupe takes the concepts he started to develop in Le Grupe and forms them into an integrated media show on the avant garde edge of dancing.

"I evolved from traditional dancing, outgrowing it like puberty. I don't mean to put it down because we moved up from it and didn't really break with it," he says.

Michael's particular form of entertainment grew out of classical ballet and he considers it more flexible. "It lets you use the full scope of your intelligence. The dancer is not just a human machine... We started out by throwing out all the decoration (in traditional dance), and experimenting. I feel as if an integrated approach lets the audience think, and the performers get something from the audience as well."

His troupe can be classified under the ever-burgeoning umbrella of 'multi-media art'. His shows combine dancing, video, films, and slides with live and recorded music into an organic creation. In the ranks of the likes of Philip Glass and Laurie Anderson, Montanaro says, "Performances of this are the ambience of the eighties, a slice of life, so to speak. People like Laurie Anderson and Philip Glass are opening a lot of doors these days."

"We are in a new Renaissance," says Montanaro. "The 80's are a time when wild variety is being accepted. It's surprising, but a group like ours is considered commercial even though we are innovative. Art no longer has to specialize in one area. With integrated media we can show the interaction between the human and the not-alive."

"We use technology, like computer animation, but we don't use it just for the sake of using it. Before using something like film, we ask ourselves 'do we really need this to portray what we want?'" he says.

"These different technologies let us portray different concepts. Videos, for instance, let you portray time very effectively

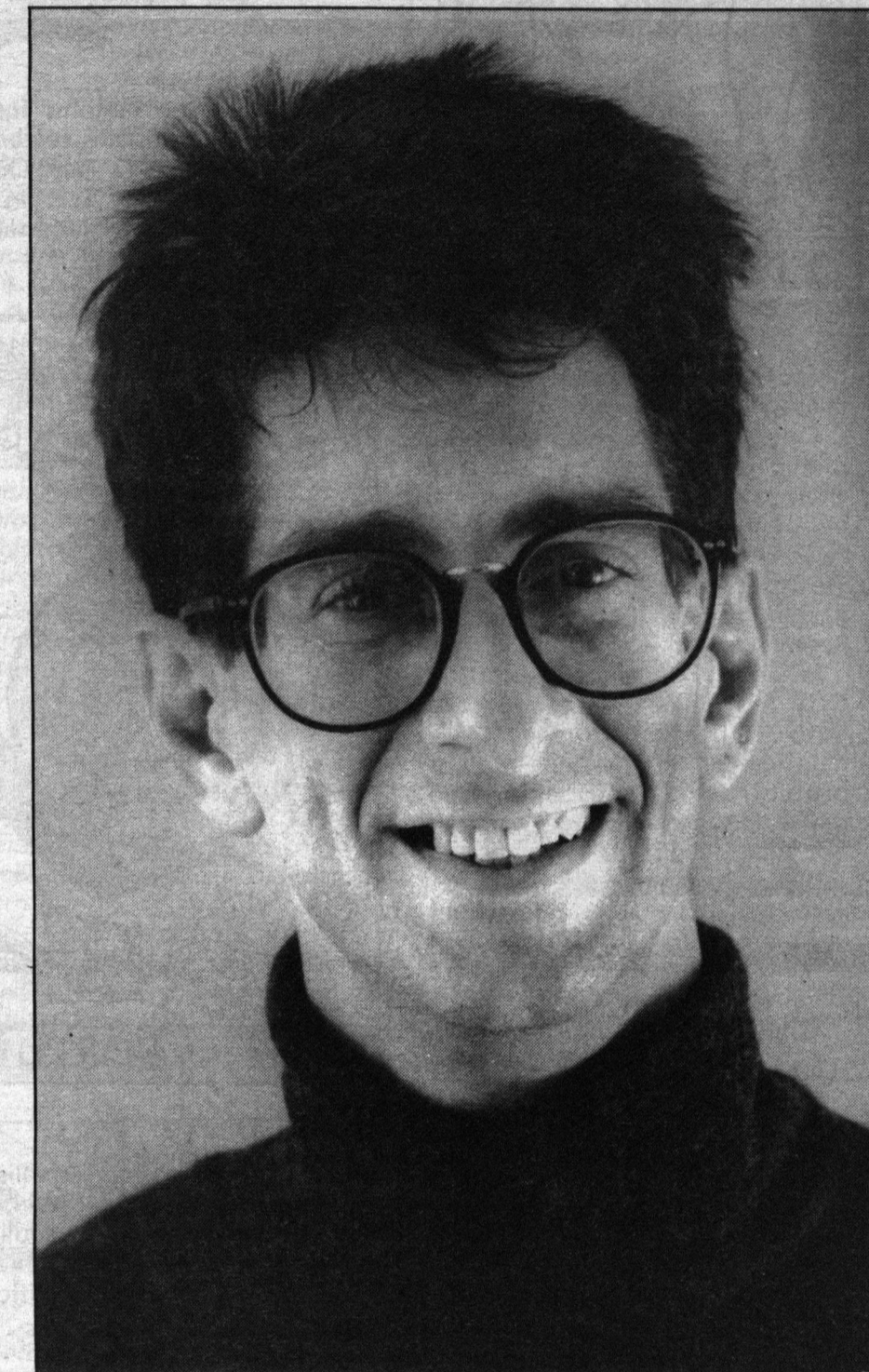


photo Rob Schmidt

in a way that you couldn't normally do on stage. We use them if we have to show any massive amounts of information in a short time. And we use slides often to portray oversized and large objects."

"The dancing, music, lights, and the technology all have to fit together to form

one cohesive unit." He then describes one particular instance where he used a video monitor to show a bartender from the waist up. "The performer would bend over and the video image would light the performer's cigarette," then with stage tricks the performer's cigarette would light.

The components of Montanaro's shows grow together. "I usually compose a little section of movement and then go over to the piano and compose some music for it. I don't do a dance and the music afterwards or the other way around. It all grows at the same time." In case you haven't figured it out, Michael composes the troupe's music as well as choreographing it.

He worked his way through dance school as a bar band drummer, and he derives his shows from his musical as well as dance experience. "I find that, being a drummer, I am drawn to more rhythmical music, but that has not stopped me from using melodic pieces as well," he relates. "I like to let my pieces develop a life of their own, and I only direct their direction. I am not afraid if it starts to take off on a tangent."

Most of the pieces his group performs are arranged by "a committee of four" members of the group. They give themselves a lot of room and don't feel the need to be bound by traditional dance, but "we aren't afraid of looking at what we may have discarded from classic dance to see if it is useful," Michael says.

The show his group will be putting on at SUB Theatre Sunday night will consist of two parts, the first *900 Seconds of Eights* being a preview of sorts of a piece that will be presented next year. "It's about the rhythm and the ridiculous," he says with enthusiasm and energy. "It's very interestingly set; people in the audience stand up with remote controls and change what is going on on-stage. A spy story goes on in the lobby outside the theatre..."

The main piece being performed, *East of Egypt*, is named for the mood it sets. *East of Egypt*, that's Israel! People say. But that's not it. The name is a play on words, *East of Eden*, and all that, but it's really named for the feeling of the whole thing."

"I feel very lucky because, as an artist, I am allowed to project my imagination for others." As for his troupe, he says, "We are lucky because we all clicked together. We are not very tightly knit like a family, but when we work together we are like one person."

As for the future, he would like "to let the group grow, so that we could concentrate our energies in the creative aspects and worry less about the administrative side of things. It's something we do ourselves right now." Although his current tour only has Canadian dates, his next tour is planning to take a dip into the States as well.

"I really can't imagine doing anything else besides dancing," Michael Montanaro concludes.

Einstein — the anguish of genius

interview by **Roberta Franchuk**

Albert Einstein was one of the greatest scientific minds ever. His thoughts revolutionized the way we think of the universe around us, and the potential of all his ideas is still not fully understood even today. Yet Einstein was also very humanistic, fond of children and deeply concerned about the human race.

It is this essential contradiction between his work's awesome potential as expressed in the creation of the atomic bomb, and his pacifist beliefs that actor Peter Boretski sees as the major anguish in Einstein's life.

Boretski portrays the great scientist in a one-man show called *Einstein* opening at the Kaasa Theatre Oct. 31. The play is set in Einstein's study at Princeton on his 70th birthday, and features Einstein's reminiscences of his life, his work, and his ideas.

Boretski, who has been playing this role for 2½ years, says the creation of the

character is always fascinating — "every night I find another nuance."

According to Boretski, Einstein's pacifism sprung from his deeply held beliefs. "He believed strongly in a harmony in the cosmos, which to him was God." Ironically, he was not a practicing Jew, but his persecution by the Nazis in World War II force him to make his pacifism active. He fled to America and finally joined in the work to develop the atomic bomb. He had not fully realized the potential of his work, and he "was appalled at the destruction the bomb created in Japan," explains Boretski.

After this, "coming to grips with what the world was doing to itself because of his work was his major dilemma." He began to fear that "he was coming too close to discovering the creation that man would use to destroy God's creation."

Yet his genius could not be ignored. Boretski says, "Einstein was a workaholic... he was driven by something other than a desire for anything." He believed that "he

must continue to split the elements of the world into their tiniest possible forms."

Boretski endeavors to show people "the life of turmoil that a genius has to live... it's like having a cancer."

The format of the one-man show is "tiring... it's exhausting to speak for 90 minutes, but I look forward to it. The audience gives a great deal — they are extremely attentive and perceptive." Not having another actor to play off is not a problem — "the vibrations from the audience are equal to those from another actor."

The research into Einstein's character, both by Boretski and the playwright, Gabriel Emanuel, included biographies, letters, and newsreels of Einstein. During this investigation, Boretski says, "I found insights into myself."

Einstein "showed me how to grow old more gracefully."

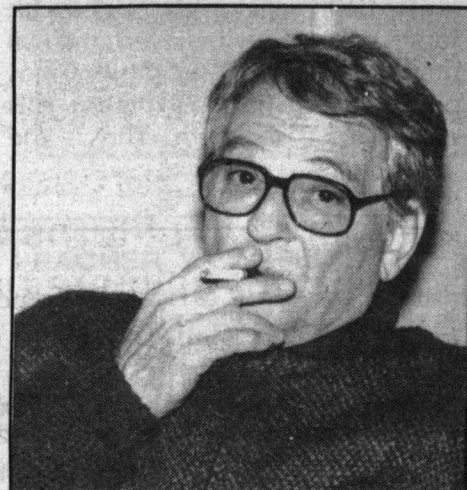


photo Rob Schmidt

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