

No drugs needed to see Blumer

The Late Blumer
Nexus Theatre
through February 25

review by Teresa Pires

"Behold yon homo sap, who covered the world with crap," proclaims Blumer in *The Late Blumer*, a modern version of Rip Van Winkle.

Blumer, a typical '60s hippie who is into sex, drugs, and flying kites takes some (surprise! surprise!) drugs on August 14, 1967 which have some unexpected results.

Acid casualties

John Milton Branton and Alison Wells (on the couch) and Kevin Hare (standing) in *The Late Blumer*.



Dragos Ruiu

After climbing into his psychedelic trunk, his "favourite place for getting his cerebrum stoned," Blumer goes on a long "trip" only to wake up in 1984.

"It must have been some sort of side effect," says a bewildered Blumer, who looks as if he had just been at Woodstock. "I'm going to have to rethink my karma."

Surprised by his return as they clean out Blumer's old room are Elaine, "heavy into art", Rex, her son and Shelley, a neighbour.

Rex, played by Kevin Hare, was once "an uptight 8 year old... chronic bed-wetter" and is now an uptight yuppie heavily into real estate. Hare does an excellent job in his role as Rex; he is a prude, he is a whiner, and he is hilarious.

Shelley, played by Rebecca Starr, is the idealistic young law student (and nuclear war activist) who drew her inspiration from Blumer in her childhood. She is energetic and exuberant but not much beyond that. Alison Wells is Elaine, a '60s flower child turned into a tacky, middle-aged modern woman. Although Blumer's

return rekindles some of her former vivacity and idealism, Elaine remains somewhat drab and unconvincing next to him.

The show really belongs to John Milton Branton, who plays Blumer. Branton is at times sarcastic, at times profound, but always extremely funny. He is at ease in his part; in fact, Branton's two year absence from the stage, like Blumer's 17-year absence from life, appears to have left him not worse, but better off.

After he accepts that he had been sleeping for 17 years, Blumer tries to adjust to the '80s and thus dons the spandex tights and an upbeat, shorter haircut. The problem arises when he tries to adjust to the ideas of the '80s.

"Whatever happened to the Big Dream?" he asks. "I thought we'd have our shit together by now."

For a light, hilarious entertainment, go for a "trip" through the '60s with *The Late Blumer* at Nexus Theatre. Like, it's happening.

Orchesis dance at SUB

Orchesis Dance Motif '89
SUB Theatre
February 4

review by Lindy Sisson

This was the 24th production of the University of Alberta's creative dance group. Over the years Orchesis has presented choreography by Peggy Baker, Brian Webb, Maria Formolo and founder Dorothy Harris, among others. Their annual presentation of Dance Motif provides new and experienced choreographers and student dancers the opportunity to present new works.

In the last couple of years, Orchesis has opened the stage door to other performing dance groups: this year's program included Grant MacEwan's Children's Dance Program, and the Victoria Composite High School Dancers. Orchesis "affiliates" included the newly formed University Ballroom group, Belle Image, and the show wouldn't be complete without a dance from Vanessa Harris' Jazz Moves class. With such a mixture of styles and ability levels, pacing this show has always been

difficult, and the order in which the dances were presented this year didn't fix this problem.

An uninspired jazz dance by Shirley Sulak called "Chicks" set to music by Colin James began the program — which would have gotten off to a much stronger start with the next piece, "Meeting and Parting," choreographed by Ann Kipling Brown for the Grant MacEwan Children's Dance Program. Of the three "movements" to J.S. Bach, the first was rather stiff, but in the second lyrical style took over from the interesting geometric patterns and began to build, finding different themes and dynamics in the music.

The second half of the program opened with "Clouds In My Coffee," choreographed by Yohan Tan, a romantic piece

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The Empty Chair

Anton Solomon and chair have the stage all to themselves.

Chair intense drama

The Empty Chair
Phoenix Theatre
through February 12

review by Boris Zvonkovic

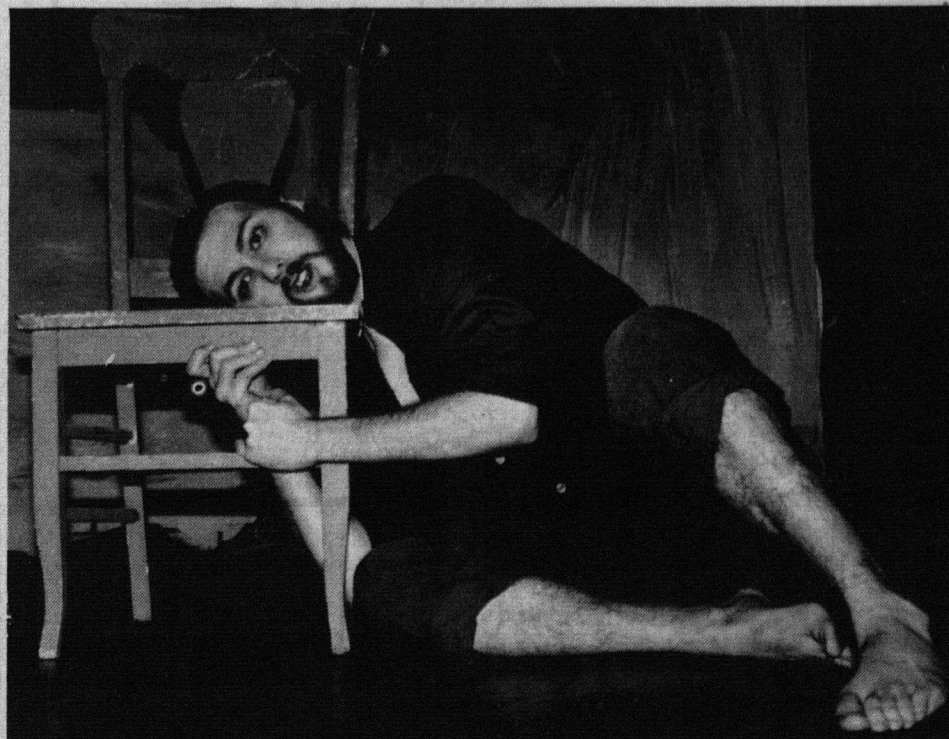
"What about our emotions...?" Emotion is what artist Vincent Van Gogh (1853-1890) successfully captured in some of his major works, and the emotions of Van Gogh are what actor Anton Solomon successfully conveys in playwright Dwayne Brenna's *The Empty Chair*.

On a modest set, with simple lighting, Solomon delivers an intimate and absorbing portrayal of the tormented artist during the last days of his life in an asylum at Saint-Remy, France. Because of his fear of losing his sanity, and thus losing his ability to paint, Van Gogh asked to be temporarily interned in the asylum in 1889 and kept under medical supervision. During this twelve month period, Van Gogh was haunted by recurrent attacks, alternating between moods of calm and despair. *The Empty Chair* shows the mental anguish of a once caring individual who

has lost faith in his fellow man after being rejected, not only by his contemporaries, such as Paul Gauguin, but also by the women he loved; "this beast has a human soul, he feels what others think of him."

Van Gogh, who was part of the group of artists in the late 19th century known as Post-Impressionists, is today held to have been the greatest Dutch painter after Rembrandt, and his work has had a powerful influence on the development of modern painting. In 1988 Van Gogh's painting "Sunflowers" sold for \$82 million, the most ever paid for a painting to date. However, of the hundreds of drawings and paintings Van Gogh produced, most of which were done during the last years of his life, he only sold one during his lifetime and remained virtually unknown and penniless.

Brenna's play is not a lighthearted skit, nor is it a grand production. It is rather an intense monodrama that is carried on the sheer energy of Solomon's engrossing portrayal of a distraught soul. *The Empty Chair* gives one a revealing glimpse of the emotion and genius behind some of the world's most expressive paintings.



Ron Sears