

# The arts

## Melting-pot theme carries production

Oscar Wilde once stated that the only unforgivable sin is to be boring. In this sense at least, *Hester Street* is an unforgivable film.

*Hester Street* begins, curiously enough, on Hester Street on the Lower East Side of New York in 1896. Ninety minutes later it ends at the same place, and the shame of it is that so little happens in between.

The film centres around the plight of a recent Russian immigrant, Yekel Berel (adopted American name: Jake), who sends for his wife and son to join him and in the meantime involves himself with another woman, a Polish immigrant named Mamie. Jake befriends yet another immigrant, an orthodox Russian Jew named of Bernstein, who comes to live with Jake and his family. From

here the love-quadrangle is easily set in motion: the Americanized Russian, Jake, desires the Americanized Pole, Mamie; the conventional wife, Sittl, is drawn towards the devout best-friend, Bernstein. Neat, huh? But so damn predictable.

The film is shot in black-and-white, which for the most part works well, managing to effectively capture the desolation of the turn-of-the-century immigrant slums. But the greyness of the photography is never aided by the color of personality, as it sometimes is in other modern movies filmed in black and white (one thinks of *Lenny* and *The Last Picture Show*, for instance). Also on the technical side of things, there are times when the actual filming is simply sloppy; in one scene a ceiling mike is seen dangling in the upper part of the screen - it moves in and out of the viewer's vision, leaving a shadow in its wake. That sort of thing is inexcusable even in the most low-budget of films.

The acting in *Hester Street* ranges from adequate to awful. As the arrogant yet naive Jake, Steven Keats is certainly the most convincing of the cast. As Jake's wife, Carol Kane is beautifully forlorn, but her performance often seems too restrained. Mel Howard's Bernstein is appropriately somber and scholarly, but also uninspiring. Dorrie Kavanaugh as the dance instructor, Mamie, approaches the burlesque.

But it is the "melting pot" theme of the film which is left to carry the production, and which is in fact responsible for the few good moments in the film. To come to America is to become an American: old styles, customs and even religions are to be left behind. Conformity is the rule and social exiles are the exceptions. It's a fine theme but it's poorly directed towards a conclusion that is simply unsatisfying. This short, meaningfully film is in the end strangely unmoving; the disparity between what is and what could have been, being just too great.

*Hester Street* is presently playing at the Varscona Theatre.

by Brian Bergman

## Two-fold concert offered

Big band jazz and choral music will be performed at two concerts sponsored by the U of A's department of music.

Selections by Thad Jones, Woody Herman, Dizzy Gillespie and Duke Ellington will be played by the U of A Stage Band Thursday, Mar. 18 at 8 p.m.

The concert will take place in Convocation Hall in the Arts Building on campus and is free and open to the public.

Sacred music, negro spirituals, and folk compositions will be sung by the U of A Concert Choir Saturday Mar 20 at 8 p.m.



Northern Light Theatre and Theatre 3 join to present *Happy Birthday America*, a musical revue

## Tongue in cheek, Canada salutes USA

Northern Light Theatre and Theatre 3 join forces this month to present the premiere of *Happy Birthday America*, a revue with music opening Mar. 16 in the Northern Light Theatre space at the Edmonton Art Gallery.

Written and compiled by Allan Lysell, Frank Moher, and Scott Swan, with music by Larry Reese, *Happy Birthday America* is a roller-coaster ride through 200 years of American adventure, diplomacy, and intrigue. Life in the USA, as it is played out daily by grave-diggers and presidents, soldiers and saints, is viewed from a Canadian perspective, with hat and cane in hand and tongue in cheek.

The score by Larry Reese includes "The Statue of Liberty Torch Song" and "The Uncle Sam (Red, White, and) Blues."

*Happy Birthday America* is directed by Theatre 3's Mark Schoenberg, with musical direction by Larry Reese, and additional music by John Wheelwright. Design is by Gie Roberts.

Kathie Ball and Sheelah Megill join Northern Light Theatre directors Allan Lysell and Scott Swan in the company.

Two versions of *Happy Birthday America* will be presented during the four week run. A full-length evening version will run March 16 through 20 in the Northern Light Theatre space at the Art Gallery, with special matinees scheduled for Thursday and Saturday.

A 45-minute lunch-hour version will subsequently be

presented March 22 through April 9 at the Art Gallery. These performances are at 12:10 p.m. Monday through Friday, with additional 1:10 p.m. performances on Thursdays and Fridays.

## Dance is energy, enthusiasm

*Les Ballets Jazz* is a company lovingly shaped by the directorship of an exceptional woman - Eva von Gency. The group performed Mar. 12 and 13 to a highly enthusiastic, near-capacity crowd at the Student Union Theatre.

I have watched Eva von Gency teach. I've watched her direct rehearsals and in those classes and rehearsals I've seen her direct high levels of energy, concentration and above all, involvement. These qualities have most certainly been imparted to the thirteen dancers of the company. Their involved performance on Friday night proved this beyond all doubt.

Eva's particular style of jazz, as exhibited in two pieces of her choreography *Up There... Souls dance undressed together* and *Jazz Sonata*, requires bodies that are keenly strong, flexible, and highly sensitive to her exquisite syncopations. Both men and women in the company display flowing rhythmic bodies that are capable of sharp edges - clean and controlled.

*Up There and Jazz Sonata* exhibited Ms. von Gency's multi-faceted choreographic skills. *Up There* is composed of six sections. Each section is a different mood heightened by use of effective lighting. The choreography was sensitive to the music, the music to the mood and the mood to the lighting. A cool reflective *pas de deux* by Odette Lalonde-Peterson and Lorne Toumine showed technical polish but more than a little stiffness. This was greatly contrasted with the next section where strong musical rhythms brought the company to life, first playfully, then aggressively. *Tranquility* was an unusual adage with six couples making intricate birdlike designs.

*Jazz Sonata*, the final piece of the program, progressed from classical ballet into a loose jazz - pure physical expression in a musical structure. The transitions were so smooth that they go almost unnoticed, we were hardly surprised to find the

Tickets for both the evening and lunch-hour performances are available from the Theatre3/Northern Light Theatre box-office at 426-6870. Group and school bookings will also be taken.

dancers near the end of the piece clapping hands, laughing and shouting encouragement to each other as they each completed solo variations. This is where we saw dancers loving dance; loving to express, to move, to show off and enjoy every minute of it. These skillful, sensitive contrasts display the control and ease that Ms. von Gency has in her art.

The triumph of the evening, however, was *Hommage A Duke* choreographed by Richard Jones to the music of Duke Ellington. Jones was able to incorporate the dance fashions of Ellington's era into this piece without leaning heavily on nostalgia. Subtle hand movements invoke moments of old cabaret and vaudeville style jazz. Patricia Strauss, a svelte dancer with exquisitely long

limbs, gives a marvellous performance in this piece. She leaves one with the definite impression that she was created expressly for the role she dances, or it for her.

Costumes throughout the evening were generally unassuming with the exception of *Hommage A Duke*. Turbans and sparkles neatly and succinctly captured the essences of this bygone era.

In all, the company's performance was a strong one. There was a consistent high level of technical expertise as well as energy output. The enthusiasm and enjoyment of their art was infectious. I'll bet a lot of enthused people left the performance thinking about taking jazz classes.

by Susan D. Poohkay

## Farm Show film

In 1972 the innovative *Theatre Pass Muraille* moved into the farming community of Clinton, Ont., and made a play out of the stories and the people of that region. The following summer they took their play, *The Farm Show*, on a tour of farming communities of south-western Ontario, sometimes performing in auction barns.

The U of A English Dept. will present a special film showing called *The Clinton Special*, which is a documentary of the tour, with several scenes from the play. The film, by Michael

Ondaatje, (poet, winner of the Governor General's Award, 1970) also includes interviews with the actors - on how the play was made, and with the people the play was made about.

A Toronto Star reviewer described it this way: "As a record of a particular experience, and as a document about a form of our theatre which may prove historic, Ondaatje's *The Clinton Special* is exceptional."

The film will be shown in AV L-1 of the Humanities Centre, Mar. 17, at 6:30 p.m.

## And miles to go before they laugh

Stage West Dinner Theatre presents *Norman, Is That You?* which begins Mar. 17 and will run until April 24.

ABC-TV describes the play, written by Ron Clark and Sam Bobrick, as full of "yards and yards of solid laughs, miles of funny jokes."

Starring in the production is Gale Gordon, who supported Lucille Ball for thirteen years in her two television series (he was

the always-irate banker, remember?).

And beginning on Mar. 21, and continuing for four consecutive Sundays, Stage West presents a new series of culinary entertainment, featuring the Big Band Sounds of Gary Guthman and his 18-piece orchestra. Price (\$9.95) per person includes dinner and concert.

## Pianist returns to ESO

Shura Cherkassky, the pianist who electrified Edmonton audiences in 1973, returns to perform with the Edmonton Symphony Orchestra, under the direction of Pierre Hetu.

The concert will be at 8:30 p.m. on Mar. 20 and at 2:30 p.m. on Mar. 21 at the Jubilee Auditorium.

Cherkassky has recorded with the Berlin Philharmonic for Duetsche Grammophon and has made other recordings for Philips Records.