

ENTERTAINMENT

York Independent Theatre Productions

Campus theatre troupe will stay if supported

Paul Pivato

York Independent Theatre Productions is in the business of providing entertainment. Founded in 1981, Y.I.T.P. is producing the Broadway hit *Grease* and in many ways, the company's survival hinges on its success.

"Not only do we have to get *Grease* off the ground, but also Y.I.T.P.," explains Natalie Lue, the company's secretary and Publicity Director for the musical. Accordingly, *Grease* has all the necessary ingredients of success—it's popular, youth-oriented, energetic entertainment. It's also safe.

"We want the company to continue," says Lue. "If we can get an audience that knows us, we can go ahead and do almost anything." They're counting on *Grease's* appeal. "Music is the common base," notes Bonnie Craig, executive producer and vice-president of the board. "Everybody loves music."

Y.I.T.P. is a student-initiated, volunteer non-profit organization that is actually only a Board of Directors. Part of the board's mandate is to supply "entertainment of the highest professional calibre." But it was also established to give students experience in working with a professional.

Y.I.T.P. believes it offers more than the York theatre department. "We take the classroom experience one step further," says Lue, adding that the Theatre Department is hampered by various restrictions and guidelines. The board however, denies criticism that the company is in competition with the department.

President Rob Berry sees the present Y.I.T.P. board as pioneers establishing a large-scale theatre tradition at York, similar to the University of Western Ontario's "Purple Patches". The York board members, most of whom are theatre students, hope to choose next year's members from faculties other than theatre. "This year," explains producer Allana Jones, "we're trying to get the company stabilized, so it

helps to have people who understand how theatre works."

Grease suffered a major set-back last week when they lost choreographer, Ian Robertson. His departure was due to "personal and professional commitments on the part of Mr. Robertson". Y.I.T.P. stresses that the inability to continue was not because of personal or financial problems.

"It's unfortunate," said Craig. "We didn't foresee it and neither did Ian. We'll have to start from scratch and go through the whole process of choosing a musical director." Apparently, Robertson was unable to meet all of the board's demands. "We're asking students to give up their time. The professional people have to do likewise," commented Lue on Robertson's departure. The director and choreographer are paid; the cast is volunteer.

The board may hire a York faculty member, but refuses to speculate. "We won't discriminate in favour of York people," insists board member, Ayelet Baron, who works in publicity. "We're looking for the person with the most experience."

After a shaky start, Y.I.T.P. is now financially secure. The company has raised approximately 10,000 dollars in small grants and loans from CYSF, various colleges, as well as from private and corporate sponsors. Most of the money will be spent on production. Last year, Y.I.T.P. repaid all its loans with the revenue generated by *Hair*. Since Y.I.T.P. is a non-profit organization, any profits will be funnelled into the Arts Management Award or reinvested in the company, giving next year's board a pool of cash to draw from. Lue points out that there are "not only production costs, but also company costs. We need some money to keep the company going."

Y.I.T.P. recently acquired the right to use Burton auditorium for the staging of *Grease*. "With a stage like Burton the play will be especially challenging for the designers," notes Business Manager, Heather

Sherman. "It's really big and open, which will be great for the dance sequences." Sherman would not disclose the rental cost. "It's not necessary information," claims Lue. "We open our books at the end of the year, but not until then."

Production on *Grease* has already begun. The turnout at auditions was so great that extra evenings had to be scheduled. Out of approximately 44 who auditioned, 44 were called back. Of these, the director will cull the best twenty or so actors to fill all the parts.

The director, Jim Biros, was unanimously selected by the board. As artistic director of Theatre on the

Move, Biros has written, produced and acted for Toronto Free Theatre and Young People's Theatre. "He's willing to spend the time to teach," says Lue. "He inspires confidence."

When asked whether the Y.I.T.P. is only using the university as a testing ground for work which eventually leaves the campus, Lue maintains, "Our by-laws are independent so we don't have to stay on campus." However, she cites the company mandate, which is to serve the York community. "I think the fact that York is part of our name indicates that Y.I.T.P. will stay on campus as long as York supports it."

The board is extremely conscious of

Hair's success last year but does not want to exploit the popularity of the Hollywood version of *Grease*. "Grease is real rock n'roll, not bubblegum." The company is excited about the enthusiasm they've already generated on campus. "Football games can't match it," believes Doug Ross, one of the three founding members. Although the company met with some opposition last year, more people, such as the Dean of Fine Arts, are openly supportive. "If there was any doubt, none of us would be here," insists Craig. "You don't put this much work into something you're not sure of."

The power of a jury

Attorney Newman awaits life's verdict

Marshall Golden

Twelve men and women file into the room. The courtroom is hushed as the jury takes their seats. One man rises and everyone waits to hear whether life will be changed for better or for worse: they await the verdict.

In Sidney Lumet's Christmas release, *The Verdict*, the final results of that societal judgement will represent much more than money or victory. This verdict will indicate whether or not one man has been successful in his effort to become a productive human being. This film is a story of a man's fight against the system, but it is also a story about a man's fight against himself.

In *The Verdict*, Paul Newman plays Frank Galvin, once one of Boston's foremost lawyers, who has reached rock bottom. Although acquitted of trying to bribe a jury, his law firm fired him due to unfavourable publicity. His wife then left him, he became a drunk and his law business dwindled to three clients in four years. Alcoholic and dejected, Galvin becomes an "ambulance chaser", visiting funeral parlours to drum up business.



Paul Newman is a down-and-out lawyer in Sidney Lumet's Christmas release, *The Verdict*.

Newman is outstanding as Galvin, giving the character the proper mix of pathos, humanity and a burning inner desire to succeed. The audience is able to identify with his faults and yet care about his fate.

Galvin, in an act of sympathy, is offered a big bucks malpractice suit by a former partner, Mickey Morrissey (well-played by Jack Warden). A woman enters the hospital for a routine birth, in a delivery attended by two famous doctors. There are complications when she is given the wrong anaesthetic and her heart stops. She suffers severe brain damage and becomes a vegetable kept alive by Her baby dies.

The girl's family wants to sue the hospital and the doctors for negligence. The hospital owned by the Archdiocese of Boston, does not want the publicity nor do they want to pay the requested settlement of \$600,000.00. Galvin is hired but when an out-of-court settlement fails, he is faced with a huge personal dilemma.

Galvin would much rather stay out of court because the odds are stacked against him. He has not actively practised for years; the judge is known to favour the defendant and has already expressed contempt for Galvin; and finally, the defense counsel is the most adept and devious lawyer in Boston. As Mickey Morrissey put it, "He's the prince of fucking darkness!"

Realizing "it's now or never," Galvin takes the Archdiocese to court. This case provides the last half

of the film with some of the most exciting courtroom drama in memory. The trial is filled with surprise and an incredible emotional intensity. Awaiting the verdict, the audience suffers the same unbearable tension portrayed on the screen.

In more and more current films, the main premise involves a situation which has people functioning within it. When, *The Verdict* director, Sidney Lumet, makes films, however, he starts with a person and builds a situation around that character. As Lumet has shown in his earlier works, *Serpico*, *Dog Day Afternoon* and *Network*, a film has more depth when the character, not the situation, is pre-eminent. The audience can identify with the protagonist. Films which build from a situation are often trite, shallow and lack character empathy. *The Verdict* is none of these. Lumet makes us care.

Lumet's direction is taut and exciting and the film's production values are high. The only flaw lies in the pacing as the film takes a long time to get rolling. The first third is too slow for comfort. However, when it does start moving, *The Verdict* comes at you like a cannon ball.

It is a film that deals with corrupt justice, a man who fights the establishment, and most of all, a system whereby 12 ordinary people can pass judgement not only on the law, but also on one man's struggle against his worst foe—himself.

Oh Chaucer misses the point

Vanier sanitized bawdy Chaucer

J. Brett Abbey

One of the closing ideas in Vanier College's production *Oh Chaucer*, proclaimed, "If you liked what you saw, thank God. If you didn't like what you saw, then perhaps you could chalk it up to our inability to express it well."

Three tales from Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* made up *Oh Chaucer*, which played Dec. 2 to Dec. 4. It was an evening of light entertainment that played with the bawdy side of Chaucer's tales. While the production did express the tales with a strong sense of realism, there was an overwhelming lack of courage in the cast. This cowardice destroyed the power of *Oh Chaucer*.

The opening was exciting and unique. In Vanier Dining Hall, the audience sat before an empty floor space where a stage would have been set, traditionally.

Distant sounds introduce a wagon-load of travellers, which rolls up and stops in the previously empty space. Soon, more carts arrive on the scene and these travellers become familiar with one another. Suddenly, set designer Rennie Zwolinski's splendid idea unfolds: the carts form a solid stage, where no stage had

existed.

Having already begun their tales, the travellers try to out-do each other in previously-told stories. These three, "The Merchants", "The Millers", and "The Stewards" tales vividly produce unique entertainment. The live musical accompaniment and costumes set the medieval tone. The audience was set to believe anything, having been taken to a point in their group imagination that would produce robust laughter.

However, the audience was taken no further. To be believable all actors must focus attention to the enactment of the story. Too many supporting cast members focused on the audience, as if for approval.

Also, the tales suffered from being half-heartedly bawdy. Director Gary Schallenberg did not go all the way, with exposed flesh or allude to various sex acts off-stage. If he had, *Oh Chaucer* might have worked.

However, *Oh Chaucer* winds up in limbo, neither here nor there, with 'high school hijinks' sexual overtones. It almost comes across as a journey through the sexual exploits of a small town. Perhaps *Oh Chaucer*, should have been presented on afternoon television.

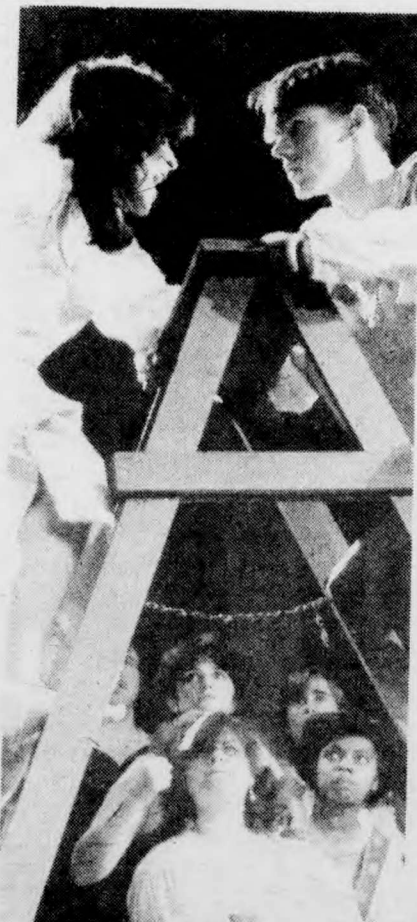


photo: John Klemm