

# arts

## The Suicide is just the beginning

by Jennifer Horsey

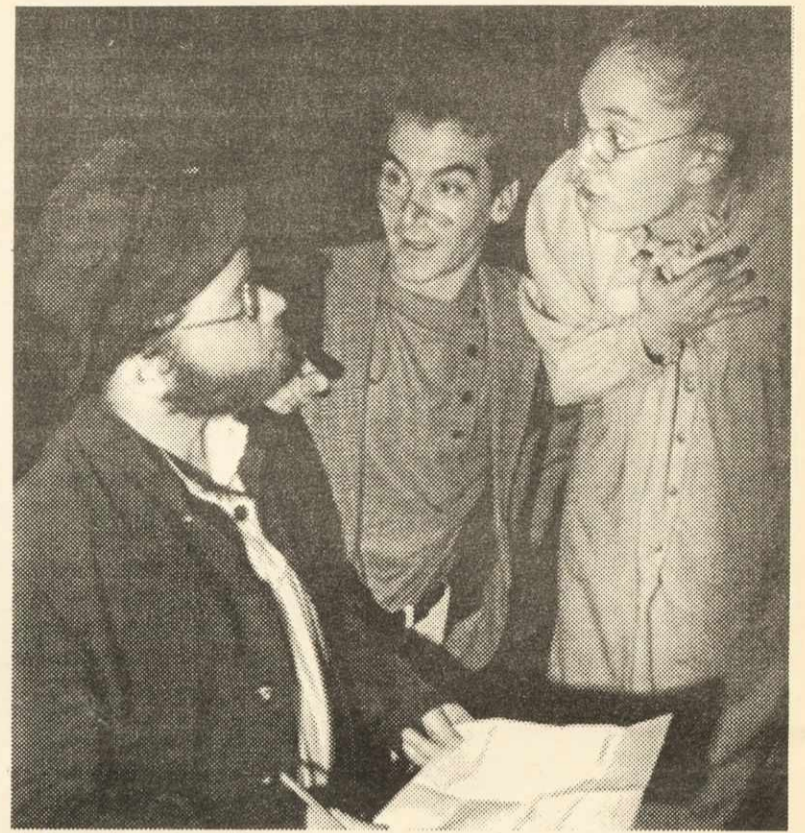
*The Suicide* is a strong start for the 1993-94 season of the Dalhousie Theatre Department. This Soviet satire, written by Nikolai Erdman and directed by Svetlana Zylina, is set in the late 1920s in Communist Russia.

*The Suicide* is a comedy about a man who is troubled by the fact that he has not had work in a year, and who is persuaded by his neighbour that he should be contemplating suicide. The neighbour, Alexander Petrovich Kalabushkin (played by James Fowler), sees this troubled man as an opportunity for others to have a martyr for their personal causes and, in an amusing exchange, manages to convince Semyon (Jeffrey Simlett) that suicide is the best solution. Semyon acquires a gun but before he can kill himself, he is interrupted by a number of individuals who have heard of his plight from the ever-helpful neighbour, and who want him to die for their causes. Because his

original feeling about his death was that "no one is to blame," Semyon is easily convinced that there are many good reasons to die.

As the play progresses, Semyon struggles to convince himself that he must die for one or all of the causes that are presented to him, though it becomes evident to the audience that the idea of killing himself never really appealed to him at all.

A suicide seems to be an odd premise for a comedy, but in this case it works well. The action is constant as the actors keep emerging from a bewildering number of places onto the stage. James Fowler's Alexander is a consistently strong performance, and the spineless Semyon is well-played by Jeffrey Simlett. There are many funny moments in the piece, and the snappy dialogue keeps it moving briskly through its two and a half hour length. There are times, however, when the constant action on-stage detracts from the main plot. This is especially evi-



A discussion on mortality by three of the Proletariat. DALPHOTO: KENNETH KAM

dent in scenes where all of the actors are on-stage and one's attention is divided among the pockets of comedic activity.

It is an excellent show if you want to sit down and be entertained by something for a while. It will keep you laughing, but don't expect to come away from it feeling especially enlightened. Although this piece was originally banned by Stalin before its official opening in 1932, when governmental officials deemed it subversive, it seems to be a light comedy in these times. The political overtones are nearly lost in the humour.

The irony of *The Suicide* being performed by a company that is being choked by a lack of funds cannot be ignored. Posted around the theatre entrance are some of the letters that have been sent in support of Dalhousie arts, and buttons can be acquired for the price of a donation.

*The Suicide* is showing at the David Mack Murray Theatre, Dalhousie Arts Centre, October 20-23 at 8 pm and there is a Saturday Matinee at 2 pm. Tickets can be purchased at the Dalhousie Arts Centre Box Office for eleven dollars, nine dollars for students and seniors.



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