

# Performance eases indigestion

by Alan Filewod

*Passionella*, the first production of Northern Light Theatre's current season, is an example of that most futile of dramatic forms: the social satire that revolves around an inherent contradiction. In this case, the contradiction is of a vaguely liberal nature; *Passionella* in fact reinforces the very myths it sets out to debunk.

This half-a-musical, an autonomous segment of Sheldon Harnick and Jerry Bock's hit musical *The Apple Tree*, derives from a story by Jules Feiffer, and while it maintains some of Feiffer's characteristic wit, it sorely lacks his sense of irony. The play concerns the whimsical career of Ella, a mass-media Cinderella who is afforded the opportunity to live her fantasies of stardom.

Despite the restrictions placed upon her by her electronic fairy godmother — her beauty is apparently only between "the

hours of Huntley-Brinkley and the Late Late Show" — *Passionella* falls in love and marries a rock-poet of Dylanesque measure. In the end she discovers that her macho superstar is, like herself, no more than a temporarily enchanted schmuck, and they live happily ever after.

It's a slight joke, a gag which deserves an appreciative chuckle, and it is no surprise that it cannot measure up to the demands of a one-act musical.

This play is social criticism for the well-fed, and is perhaps ideal for the type of lunch-time fare to which Northern Light Theatre has restricted itself — an engaging bromide designed to ease the digestion. It pulls no punches because there are none to pull, despite the slick veneer of fashionable social comment.

In spite of the thematic problems, *Passionella* is an engaging performance vehicle, and the Northern Light production has stressed this frothy fairy-tale aspect. Scott Swan's direction is sketchy at best; he was

seemingly too involved with the rhythm of the production as a whole to concentrate on textual and acting problems. As a result, while the performance moved well, and the chorus work was impressive, the major roles suffered. Myles Waren as Flip, the macho superstar, performed what amounted to little more than an impersonation of Sonny Bono mimicking the Fonz, and L. Peter Feldman in his brief role as Ella's boss, laboured under the weight of an unconvincing and unnecessary Jewish accent. Susan Andre, as *Passionella*, was thoroughly enjoyable while dressed in the rags of poor Ella, but far too prosaic for the glamorous role of *Passionella*, movie star. She was defeated by moments of incongruity; when sharing the stage with the chorus, her performance was overwhelmed by the stronger and more precise performances of Patricia Lenyre and Christine Willes. Wally McSween's Narrator would have been splendid — within the limited context of the script — had Swan been

able to integrate that role significantly with the remainder of the play. As it was, the narration would have been equally well served on tape.

Swan was hindered by a set design that must have looked good on paper, but desperately lacked craftsmanship in execution. The idea was that of a children's story book with pop-out pictures, but the final set was crude, lacking the delicacy required to convey a story-book quality. Each scene necessitated the turning of a massive page, an action which proved awkward on stage.

These details may be minor and given an exciting production could easily be overlooked. Unfortunately, they typify Northern Light's effort. The shortcomings of the production only served to highlight the over-all excellence of the initial production design which was severely compromised in execution. And even had those standards been reached, the effort would make little sense. The Northern Light Theatre is obviously a company with much potential, but they seem to lack in the dramaturgical sensibilities.

## French company tours

The Ballets de Marseille Roland Petit and Canadian ballet star Karen Kain will appear in Alberta during the company's premier tour of Canada this fall. Headlining the program is their interpretation of *Carmen* which ran in Paris earlier this year bringing Miss Kain international acclaim.

Alberta Culture, in cooperation with the Canada Council, will sponsor appearances of the Ballets de Marseille in Calgary and in Edmonton as part of an official cultural exchange between France and Canada. The collaboration of a Canadian dancer and French company, performing together in their respective countries, makes this tour a unique artistic venture and offers to Albertans an opportunity to enjoy the best of the international stage.

The Ballets de Marseille with Karen Kain will appear in Edmonton at the Northern Alberta

Jubilee Auditorium, October 20 at 8:30 p.m.

Tickets are available at \$7.50, \$6.00 and \$4.50 (student, senior citizen and group rates: \$6.00, \$5.00 and \$3.00) from the following outlets: Bay ticket office, Downtown, Londonderry and Southgate.

## Voila

The Edmonton French Theatre will be staging five shows during its 1976-77 season. The new season will be kicking off with two plays, which will run Oct. 15, 16, 17, 22, 23, 24.

The first show will be *La Voix Humaine* (The human voice) by Jean Cocteau and the second show on the program will be *Sammy*, by Ken Hughes and adapted by Pol Quentin. Tickets are now available from the theatre office, rm. 008, 8406-101 st., at the Carrefour, 11217 Jasper Ave, and the HUB Box Office.

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