

Entertainment

Playwright Victor Albert's big sell

by Rachel McKenzie

Expecting to interview one Lyle Victor Albert, playwright, sounds like a harrowing experience. I was pleasantly surprised, however, by a young, red haired, smiling fellow who introduced himself very casually as "Vic". Looking more eighteen than his actual twenty-five years, it is hard to believe that "Vic" already has three plays to his credit and is eagerly at work on a fourth.

Albert developed an interest in drama during his high school days in hometown Bonnyville, Alberta. He was involved in various drama productions put on by the school and became especially interested in the use of stage props and lighting. Although he has done some acting, Albert declared with a modest sigh that "it really isn't my strong point."

Albert's first two plays *The Prairie Church of Buster Galloway* and *White on White* were both influenced by his rural Canadian background. Both deal with characters in a "small town" setting. *Buster Galloway* gained some national recognition when CBC did a production of it last year.

The third play *Cut* differs from the others in that its style is more experimental and absurdist. Albert describes it as "a kind of fantasy where characters who were cut from the original scripts of plays are finally given an opportunity to come to life." The play was performed at the Fringe last summer and Albert had a small role in it.

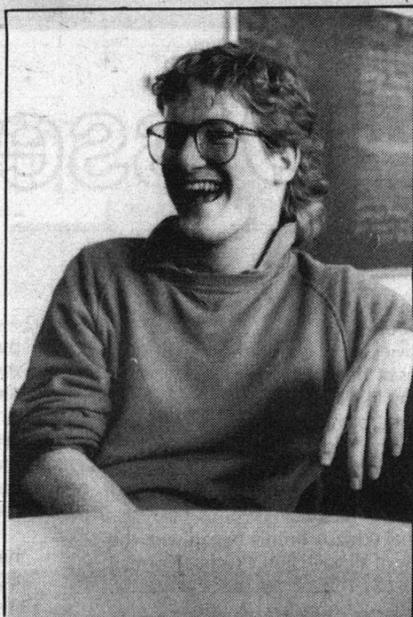
The play *White on White* deals specifically with the issue of racism within a rural community. Vic got the idea when he discovered that the KKK had actually played an active role in trying to alienate the French-Catholic settlers in the Bonnyville vicinity during the depression years. He did some research on this issue and felt that it showed excellent potential as subject matter for a play.

Albert's success in playwriting has allowed him to obtain the position of "writer-in-residence" at both Theater Network and The Northern Light Theater. He was also commissioned by Kiyano College in Fort McMurray to do a play for them. This fourth play entitled *The Big Sell: An Oil Sands Lark* will be completed hopefully by the end of April.

Albert also keeps himself busy writing occasional half-hour dramas for CBC. He approached them with some of his ideas and they were enthusiastic in their response.

For Albert, writing from the perspective of a western Canadian has proven very rewarding. "Most of the well-known Canadian writers", he claims, "are from the East." "There

Lyle Victor Albert, U of A alumni and playwright, author of *White on White* and *The Prairie Church of Buster Galloway* talks about his craft.



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are some very good western Canadian writers that are yet to be discovered."

Albert has no immediate plans for the future. He was enrolled as a full time student here at the University of Alberta in pursuit of an English degree. "I'm just two courses short of my BA, but I really don't have any desire to go back right away," chuckled Albert.

So what is it that keeps Albert motivated?



"I'm just two courses short of my B.A., but I really don't have any desire to go back right away."

Where does he get all of the inspiration for his work? "I wanted to write to see how I would do," said Albert honestly. It became obvious that he was not one to go out and conquer the world Ibsenite style; but merely someone seeking personal expression through writing. Lyle Victor Albert — playwright — is not the assuming character that his name implies.

This reporter was left with the distinct



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impression that youth was no deterrent to his ability. Indeed, with his habit of blushing modestly whenever he talked of his success, I felt that his character could only add a kind of freshness and honesty to his work.

Now that Albert has "got his foot in the door" so to speak, Canadian audiences can look forward to the name Lyle Victor Albert in future drama productions — but feel free to call him Vic!

Mukherjee offers view of women

by Lutful Kabir Khan

Bharati Mukherjee's *A Wife's Story* is far different from her earlier work, *Wife*. The difference is not subtle, it is disconcerting. Not that the wife of a Bombay businessman is substantially different from a Bengali wife. The difference lies in their varying degrees of aloofness towards traditional Indian values.

During a reading arranged by the English Dept., the writer, Bharati Mukherjee gave her explanation.

Her Canadian years were a little bitter. At motels, she was often taken for a prostitute. She was "frequently assumed to be a domestic, praised by astonished auditors that she didn't have a 'singsong' accent. The society itself, or important elements of that society routinely made crippling assumptions about her, and about her 'kind'."

In 1980, Mukherjee immigrated to the USA with her husband, Clark Blaise, and her two sons. Her American experience was a pleasant surprise. "Suddenly I was no longer aggrieved, except as a habit of mind. I had moved from being a 'visible minority' to

being just another immigrant."

The projection of this discovery is very apparent in *Darkness* (1985, penguin), a collection of her recent stories.

A Wife's Story is the selection she chose for the reading. The protagonist in the story is Panna, the wife of a wealthy Bombay businessman. She has come to the U.S. to do her Ph.D in Special Education.

Her "manners are exquisite, feelings are delicate, gestures refined, moods undetectable... her voice has the effortless meanness of well-bred displaced Third World women."

Panna wants to ignore the conflict of cultures. "Whole peoples have moved before me, they've adapted."

But Panna is scared of the insensitiveness of the American dream. "First you don't exist. Then you're invisible. Then you're funny. Then you're disgusting."

Panna wants to write Mamet; Indian women don't look like they've just been fucked by a dead cat. She wants to write Spielberg; Indians don't eat monkey brains.

When Panna's husband comes to visit her

in New York, she looks at him with critical eyes. She tries to stay indifferent to her Hungarian male friend Imre, but her unconscious mind keeps making comparisons. "Guilt, shame, loyalty. I long to be ungracious, not ingratiate myself with both men."

The most important discovery Panna makes is herself. She finds a new content self, doing things it has never done before. "I feel light, almost free. Memories of Indian destitutes mix with the hordes of New York street people, and they float free, like astronauts, inside my head. I've made it. I'm making something of my life..."

Bharati Mukherjee has consciously drifted away from the "mordant and self-protective irony" of her earlier works. The caustic experience of the bewildered Bengali wives of her earlier works are now so much more mild. The inhibition and confusion is now almost gone, and the protagonists can now search for themselves without a jaundiced eye.

