



Geoffrey Pounsett tries to show that *Art Is A Cupboard*.

show's vibe," she says, adding that the work with *Cow Over Moon* has affected her comedy.

"Sometimes a remark or situation will feed into something I can use for a monologue or character later on," says Phillips, who performs at rooms like the Joke Club, Righteous Wednesdays and the upcoming Laugh Sabbath.

The troupe has a number of successful shows under its belt, but Billy Goats marks its downtown debut.

"Kids in the suburbs don't have a lot of what kids in Toronto do," explains Phillips. When I ask if commuting is a problem, she moans. "Yeah, it's always an issue. But we've negotiated things like bus tickets now."

As for the current show, which features songs written by Phillips and Death from Above 1979's **Sebastien Grainger** (adding a bit more indie cred), the plot features a big bad business troll who wields bad contracts and swindles people out of land and sun.

Is there an anti-corporation message in there?

"Maybe a little bit," laughs Phillips. "But we don't focus on morals too much."

drama/comedy

## Russian roulette

**ART IS A CUPBOARD** by Melissa Major, directed by Geoffrey Pounsett. Presented by Sweat Company at Factory Mainspace (125 Bathurst). July 5 at 8:15 pm, July 8 and 12 at 5:15 pm, July 10 at 10:30 pm, July 11 at 6:30 pm, July 14 at noon, July 16 at 7 pm.

Association of Real Art, known by the Russian acronym OBERIU, flourished. A company of surrealist writers and artists, the group defied the authorities with their works and theories of creativity.

OBERIU is the subject of **Art Is A Cupboard**, the sophomore production of the **Sweat Company**, whose premiere show, *The Dispute*, was a big hit at last year's Fringe.

"The group was led by **Daniil Kharms**, who looked upon himself as a piece of art," explains director Geoffrey Pounsett. "He liked being naked at home, dressed eccentrically when he went out and never stopped making jokes."

**Melissa Major's** partly fictional script, subtitled *An OBERIU Documentary*, includes a frame in which a figure called *Introduktor* presents the action as an aberration from the tradition of Soviet social realism.

"He gives a historical perspective that becomes personal as the play develops," notes Pounsett, whose acting work includes *The Dispute* and *The Leisure Society*. "He becomes a keyhole for viewers to get into the world of the play."

It's hard for audiences today to see how dangerous such artists were to the Soviets.

"They were activists, but their works weren't political performances like those today that criticize Bush or Harper. Instead, they simply expressed themselves.

"But such thoughts about their fears of the world around them and their absurdist art were seen as threats to the state. Why? Because it meant the imagination could conceive of a world that was different from the one

"As Kharms says, this is a world where the absurd becomes the real. Using an extreme performance style to tell a true story creates an interesting tension, I think. It subverts the story and also makes a point about how unbelievable and remarkable the times were."

JK

drama

## Fighting the fear

**AMERIKA** by Aden Ross, directed by Jerry Rapier. Presented by Plan-B at Tarragon Extra Space (30 Bridgman). July 7 at 7 pm, July 9 at 3:30 pm, July 10 at 10:30 pm, July 11 at 8:30 pm, July 12 at 12:15 pm, July 14 at 4 pm, July 15 at 10:30 pm.

IMAGINE BROADCASTING YOUR liberal message in the conservative heartland of the United States.

That's what **Plan-B Theatre's** been doing in Salt Lake City, Utah, most recently with their hit show *Amerika*, in which three strangers find themselves incarcerated by unknown jailers.

"The play has proven a release and a relief to our audience in the reddest of red states," says director **Jerry Rapier**. "You can't get more conservative than Utah, where there's still this grey area between Church and state."

Under the guidance of Rapier, who also teaches gay and lesbian theatre, Plan-B is the only overtly political company in the community, with a small but devoted audience.

*Amerika's* characters are a liberal librarian from Seattle, a military supply contractor from Chicago and a religious housewife from Topeka. Thrown together for reasons they can't understand, each is distrustful of the other two.

The trick for playwright **Aden Ross** was not to turn them into stereotypes, but, rather, into characters we care about. She had the hardest time with Rita, the housewife.

"It was important not to make Rita a fanatic. She turns out to be someone who has an answer – not necessarily a religious answer – about how to move the characters from their initially extreme positions to a middle ground where they can communicate with each other."

*Amerika* speaks to the concerns of many people south of the border, notes Rapier.

"To a lot of us, our country is unrecognizable right now. There's a fear of

- **HORRORS SOMETIMES PROVOKE THE**  
2 most absurdly comical of reactions.  
- Take the Soviet Union in the 20s, when  
3 Stalin's secret police were disappear-  
ing thousands of people and erasing  
4 any evidence that they'd ever existed.  
5 At the same time, the avant-garde

the Soviets wanted to create. And the  
authorities couldn't tolerate that pos-  
sibility."

The narrative includes a chorus, live  
music and historically accurate vaude-  
ville acts. One sketch has an artist ar-  
rested for coughing on Sunday.

speaking out, of using our own voices,  
of exercising our freedoms. Aden feels  
the same way, and this play is her re-  
sponse."

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