

Play begins second run tonight

by Sue Seligson

The Provincetown Theatre Company will begin tonight a second string of performances of Tom Stoppard's "Enter a Free Man," the amusing but sad tale of George Riley, a misunderstood "inventor" who lives off his daughter's salary.

Directed by Robert Teague and performed at the Art Association, the two-act play features a cast of seven local performers. Teague, who also designed the elaborate and convincing set, is the company's newcomer who made the Town Hall auditorium come alive several months ago with his direction of Dickens' "A Christmas Carol."

Riley, the inventor, portrayed by Jim Forsberg, leaves his wife and daughter every Saturday morning vowing never to return. In the local pub he announces himself a "free man" and is alternately derided and humored for his latest inventions. A stranger in the pub played by Paul Asher, to amuse himself, convinces Riley his latest invention, an envelope that is sticky on both sides of the flap, will win him fame and fortune. The man, known to Riley only as "Harry," offers himself as Riley's partner in the venture.

The bar scene grows increasingly humorous as Harry, to the disapproving glances and comments of bartender Carmen, played by Jerry Thompson, convinces Riley an unassuming patron is really an industrial spy from the stationary company. The patron, played by Jules Brenner, is harassed by Riley, who demands to see his hidden tape recorder.

The play's action shifts back and forth from the pub to Riley's home, where he lives with his patient, passionless wife Persephone, played by Sally Jennings and his sarcastic daughter Linda, played by Alexandra Hluchyj. Trapped in what she considers a hopeless masquerade, Linda tries to convince Riley to apply for government benefits but Riley is too proud and feels he has finally hit on something big with his reversable envelope. In the meantime, Linda grudgingly continues to give him a portion of her weekly paycheck and implores her mother to stop humoring Riley and see him for what he really is — unemployed.

As Linda's frustrations with her home life heighten and Riley grows more absorbed in his dreams of success, the

play reaches a dramatic climax. Riley, who returns to the pub with a suitcase, his reversable envelope and dressed in a business suit has his hopes dashed, returns home humiliated but still determined to create another work of genius that the world will be ready for. Linda experiences failure and false hopes herself when she runs off with a man only to discover he is already married.

At the close of the play, both Linda and Riley are back at home, he on his way back to the drawing board and she handing over to him the weekly portion of her salary. The mother, eternally resigned to Riley's strange behavior, sets the table for dinner.

The audience hears the sound of thunder and rainwater rushes into Riley's plant-watering contraption which, he has boasted, mimics the way mother nature cares for her plants. The only trouble is he hasn't designed a way to turn the contraption off.

The play will run through Saturday evening. The theatre company is also at work on an original production by Doug Best entitled "Beyond the Revolt of Mamie Stover." The Best play will be performed in the Back Room of the Crown and Anchor beginning March 19.

Stoppard play opens Thursday



Jim Forsberg as George Riley

"Enter A Free Man," a comedy by Tom Stoppard produced by the Provincetown Theatre Company, opens next Thursday at the Provincetown Art Association and Museum.

The play, one of Stoppard's earlier efforts, is a heartwarming comedy which has as its central character George Riley, a middle-aged inventor who has spent his career chasing illusions. Stoppard is renowned for such London and Broadway hits as "Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead," "Jumpers," and the "Real Inspector Hound."

Critic Ronald Bryden of The Observer said of the play "If we hadn't already seen 'Rosencrantz and Guildenstern' we'd be hailing 'Enter A Free Man' as the liveliest debut for years."

Jim Forsberg, a Provincetown artist, plays the role of George Riley. Other actors from the Lower Cape are Alexandra Hluchyj as Linda, Sally Jennings as Riley's wife, Jerry Thompson as the Barman, Jules Brenner as Brown, Paul Asher as Harry and Linda DiBenedetto as Florence.

The play is the second production of the Provincetown Theatre Company's 1980 to 1981 season. It is directed by Robert Teague.

Curtain time is at 8 p.m., followed by a champagne buffet reception, it will continue February 27 and 28, March 5, 6 and 7.

Our Man In Provincetown

How It Looks From Out There

By E. J. Kahn, III

It didn't happen in Camden, Maine to Bob Teague. Nor in Ankara, Turkey. Nor Frankfurt, Germany. Nor Marblehead, Massachusetts. No, for the 35 years Bob Teague has been involved with regional and community theater, he had never had to postpone an opening night. Cancel, yes. But never postpone.

So last night, which was to have been the premier performance of the Provincetown Theatre Company's production of "Enter A Free Man" by Tom Stoppard, was a first: it didn't happen.

"One of our leading ladies, Alexandra Mluchy, came down with an intestinal virus," Teague told me Wednesday, preparing to head up Cape for a meeting with the Lower Cape Arts Council (he's a candidate for the director's job there). She's running a high fever, and when she missed both Monday and Tuesday's rehearsals, I had to make a decision. So we'll push everything back a week, and open next Thursday (February 26)." The play will run three consecutive nights that week at the Provincetown Art Association, and three more the following week.

"Enter A Free Man" will be the first Theatre Company production at the Art Association this season, although it will be the company's second of the year. The first—Dickens' "Christmas Carol"—ran for four nights, under Teague's direction, at Town Hall, and actually made money for the company, which had reorganized and elected ten (out of 12) new board members last Fall. It's a play Teague has wanted to do since he moved to Provincetown last May, from Camden, Maine, where he'd been a founder and technical director of the touring William Shakespeare Company based there.

When Teague arrived here, he immediately placed a small classified ad in the local weekly asking people interested in theater to contact him. The Theatre Company, at the time, was more or less moribund, and he got a lot of phone calls. Finally, one came from the Theatre Company itself, asking him to come to their reorganization meeting. He did, and found himself put on the board. With a list of credits ranging from the National Shakespeare Company to the Ankara, Turkey Playhouse, it would hardly have made sense to do otherwise.

"I proposed 'Enter A Free Man' at that very first meeting," Teague explained, "but I added that I didn't think it could be done until February, and suggested we try to generate a little community enthusiasm by doing something for the holidays. That's how 'Christmas Carol' came to pass. And it turned out surprisingly well."

The theme of "Enter..." is particularly well-suited to a Provincetown winter. Most of the action takes place in a barroom, and the central character—one

ployment compensation. The casting is intriguing with artist Jim Forsberg playing the lead, and jeweler and Planning Board chairman Jules Brenner performing as one of his drinking buddies. Others include Paul Asher, Jerry Thompson, Ron Weissenberg, Linda DeBennetto and Teague's wife, Sally Jennings, pressed into service a couple of weeks into rehearsal (she'd been slotted to be the technical director).

"I think I could have said no," Sally mused, "but it would have been difficult."

"The play hasn't been done much," added her husband. "I don't think it's ever been done in New York, except possibly off-off Broadway. We might even have a premier on our hands."

Premiere or not, it's already a first for Teague.

ODDS AND ENDS

The Provincetown School Committee's budget hearing has been set for Tuesday night at 7:30 in the High School cafeteria. The committee's trying to hold spending at last year's level, which will mean significant cutbacks in sports, extracurricular activities, aides, and audio-visual tools...

The first impact of the Selectmen's new licensing procedures will be felt Monday night, when three different restaurants will be heard on their applications for liquor licenses. Two that never had any booze at all last summer are asking for beer-and-wine licenses, and a third—Chez Romaine—is seeking an all-alcoholic permit...

Provincetown oyster lovers are noting with satisfaction that the Wellfleet flats have finally lost their coating of sheet ice. And the deep freeze doesn't seem to have hurt the bivalves one bit.



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