

EINSTEIN

Hymn to peace, requiem for war

By JANICE WISEMAN
Freelance Reviewer

Oh, the supreme irony of it; that a play dealing with that gentlest of men, a pacifist and a musician, Albert Einstein, should be opening during one of the worst disasters in nuclear history. Were he alive today, Einstein would have been horrified by the implications of what's happening at Chernobyl. Indeed, the man portrayed in Gabriel Emanuel's monologue *Einstein*, was horrified by many of the developments his theory of relativity unleashed.

Not that Emanuel's piece, which opened at the Inner Stage yesterday afternoon as part of the Guelph Spring Festival, is angst-ridden. On the contrary. Although Einstein was aware of the potential of his theory and did sign the letter to President Roosevelt re-

questing the development of the bomb, Emanuel tempers his strongly pacifist text with humor and a wisdom that never descends to the level of cliché or empty platitudes. What emerges is a portrait of a man, child-like in many respects, devoted, but not necessarily obsessed by his work, a man who lived in his own world to the exclusion of his family, and the political and religious realities of his time. Feminists would undoubtedly find the treatment of his wives and children, cavalier; Einstein would probably have agreed, adding a saucy witticism to round out his approval.

Emanuel's writing in *Einstein* is strong, clear and inventive. We find Einstein on his seventieth birthday, and through a series of anecdotes, spiced with Einstein's personal philosophy and observations, Emanuel sneaks in, in snippets, the theory of relativity. As one audience member noted: "It's a masterful piece of teaching." But at no time is there a sense of being talked down to. The craft is there, but so low key and subtle, that mood and scene transitions

are for the most part, invisible. The net effect is moving and powerful at both the cerebral and the visceral level.

However, one wonders just how moving or powerful this play would be without the wonderful presence of Peter Boretski. With the production since its inception, Boretski has taken Einstein and turned it into a second skin. His portrayal, complete with puckish humor, and a marvellously expressive pair of bare feet, takes what could have been a dry, intellectual piece, infusing it with charm, anguish and above all a strong sense of Einstein the born-again Jew — as he notes, thanks to the Gentiles, in this case the Nazis. In Boretski's hands, Einstein's strong abhorrence of war and political game playing never becomes cant. His Einstein is at once the Jewish Zaide, and the stern philosopher — but also a man supremely aware of his own emotional and intellectual shortcomings. As he notes: "After a life's work, there is not one idea of which I can be certain."

Einstein is both a hymn to peace and a requiem for war. Chernobyl the

sombre note that sounds throughout.

At the Inner Stage, University of Guelph, this Nephesh Theatre production of Gabriel Emanuel's play *Einstein*, starring Peter Boretski, continues Friday and Saturday, at 8 p.m.



Guelph Spring Festival
1986