

### Ilsa, Queen of the Nazi Love Camp (Stage 11)

When Calgary's enterprising One Yellow Rabbit troupe undertook a musical mocking the views of the notorious J. Keegstra, they were setting themselves up for the problem faced by satirists of Nixon, Reagan and other celebrated nincompoops of our time.

What do you do when the subject seems determined to parody himself? What can you say about Ronnie or TV talk shows or corrupt evangelists that they don't say, and better, themselves?

There are reasons to see this arch-camp production which pits someone called James Keegstra against two survivors of the Holocaust — Ilsa who has kept the soldiers of the Third Reich happy, and a goose-stepping colonel.

For one thing, the Rabbit production directed by Gyl Raby is polished, timed like a malignant Reich-ian metronome, and finely acted by Andy Curtis, Ronnie Burkett and Paul Punyi.

For another, the show's dramatic premise is a clever irony. The two evil Nazis are much displeased with Keegstra. He is, they feel, trying to deny that "the best years of our lives" ever happened.

For still another, Curtis creates a James Keegstra who is not a raging maniac but a plodder who is menacingly ordinary. This Keegstra is grey in mind, body and soul whether he's drawing outlines of The Truth on his school blackboard or explaining with laborious that society is "like an internal combustion engine."

"Are you a spark-plug," he asks, "or a hose?"

It's just that, finally, appearances notwithstanding, the show doesn't have much bite. Cabaret is a much nastier musical, for example. Jolly transvestite Nazis are a deutschmark a dozen in theatre, and the ending, with its worthy suggestion that the boneheads of the world are redeemable, seems a bit laborious, too.

— Liz Nicholls



Paul Punyi, left, and Ronnie Burkett in *Ilsa, Queen of the Nazi Love Camp*