Horovitz on his plays: 'funny yet demanding'

By Kathy Hardis

"I can't really talk about how I write plays," commented Israeli Horovitz when asked about his new play, The Reason We Eat, came into existence. "I can talk about the history of the play, but I really can't go into how I approach formulating and writing specific ideas for my plays.

Boston-bred Horovitz, whose The Reason We Eat opened Sept. 23 at the Boston Repertory Theatre, is one of America's most prolific contemporary playwrights. A two time Obie Award winner and writer of over 50 plays, he has received numerous awards and grants and has been nominated twice for the Pulitzer Prize.

The Reason We Eat, billed as a "fat comedy", began as a project in a playwriting workshop taught by Horovitz at Brandeis University. He took a small scene written by one of the students and expanded the concept into a full-length play.

The first production of The Reason We Eat opened at Brandeis and was subsequently sent to New York. The current Boston performance, however, has been billed as the premiere. According to Horovitz, the first version was "...unsatisfactory. I really didn't feel it was finished. The original script wasn't strong enough to be subjected to the critics, so I refused to let any reviews be published."

"It's amazing how much the play has changed. Yet it is even more amazing how much of it remains the same," stated Horovitz. "Fortunately both Albert and I had the same concept of the play."

The major problem in interpreting The Reason We Eat is to decide whether it is about mankind's greed or simply about fat people. Apparently the concept of obesity overwhelmed the original play. "People were laughing at [the original] and using it like a Neil Simon comedy. They made light out of the first half of the play and were unprepared for the serious turn at the end. I refuse, though, to write a play making fun of obesity."

The new version of the play emphasizes the philosophy of man's intrinsic greed. Yet the humor of the original is not lost. In Horovitz's opinion, "I have a natural talent for writing comic lines and was also fortunate to work with Albert, who is also a natural comic."

Horovitz views The Reason We Eat as "a mixed metaphor — a play which is funny, yet demanding on the audience." Although it is light in treatment, the play is serious in philosophy. Both the playwright and director hope that the audience can come up with its own interpretation of its meaning.

"I feel that it's the commitment of a playwright to take the audience to somewhere which is new, both to the author and to them. If the audience does not get into new philosophical ground, the play has failed. It is the clear commitment of the playwright not to bore the audience, not to repeat himself, not to offer a one-sided interpretation. That's what theater should be."

Boston-bred Horovitz, whose new comedy, The Reason We Eat, opened Sept. 23, at the Boston Repertory Theatre, One Boylston Place.

Events

Prints of the 1970s, a special exhibition at the Museum of Fine Arts, will offer new insights into the recent graphic art of contemporary printmakers, whose styles range from realism to abstraction. Through December 4.