

Being young is, like, so complicated

While *We're Young* makes for a puzzling but ultimately satisfying show

theatre review

While We're Young

Runs 7-16 February

Written by Don Hannah

Directed by Kim McCaw

Starring the BFA acting class of 2008

Timms Centre for the Arts

EDMON ROTEA

Arts & Entertainment Staff

Ensemble films such as *Crash*, *Bobby*, or Robert Altman's *Shortcuts* feature complex plots and narratives—mental puzzles for the audience to figure out over the course of the movie. Studio Theatre's latest production, *While We're Young*, is one such challenging puzzle for the viewer to piece together.

Created for the Department of Drama's BFA acting class of 2008, the play explores the recurring challenges and adversities experienced by families: love, joy, birth, death, grief, and the atrocities and hardships of war. Director Kim McCaw outlines in the program's director notes how all plays at their core concern "the exploration of the life of a family." *While We're Young* certainly achieves these goals, especially with a cast of over a dozen characters and subplots that span more than 130 years—including six historical periods in Canadian history.

One of the most challenging aspects of any ensemble piece is conveying a clear and underlying narrative. Most conventional plays subscribe to a formulaic plot structure, but *While We're Young* attempts to break free of such conventions, with mixed results.

One interesting aspect of the play is playwright Don Hannah's representation of the progression of time. While most films and plays have a narrative that progressively goes forward, the first half of *While We're Young* regresses in time—moving backwards from the present day to the last quarter of the 18th century.

The play begins with a brother and sister reminiscing about a close friend killed while on tour in Afghanistan. Soon afterwards, the scene dissolves to a trio of hippies contemplating a



LAUREN STIEGLITZ

TRIPPIN' ON YOUTH The '60s are one of the times visited in *While We're Young*

move to Vancouver, followed by a brief musical scene of a female duet (circa 1920s) singing a piece about "falling in love" while they're young. While the costumes and dialogue provide revealing expository information about the historical period being represented—sometimes determining the importance of such scenes and events in the grand scheme of the play—how the characters relate to each other and understanding the play's underlying narrative is a feat that's both daunting and confusing for the viewer to digest and contemplate.

Despite the difficult plot and narrative, *While We're Young* features a minimalist set design, consisting of a few trees with fallen leaves, a large rock, a backdrop with changing multi-coloured designs, and a few props. Aside from the constant addition and deletion of various historical-period items, the play takes the

audience on a journey from a park in modern-day Edmonton to a night-time sentry shift in the trenches of the 1917 Battle of Paschendale, the barren fields of Afghanistan, and a farm house in 1870s Nova Scotia without any major prop shifts or blackouts for set changes.

While We're Young just seems to flow through its varied scenarios, with the most impressive spectacle being the brief recreation of a World War I firefight—a scene consisting of complete darkness, flashing lights, smoke, and the sound effects of explosions, gun fire, and yelling soldiers.

Despite the complex plot of *While We're Young*, the second half of the play provides a gradual build up and a revelation about the characters' shared history. Even with the play's complicated structure, at least all the pieces of the puzzle fall into place, providing a satisfying resolution.

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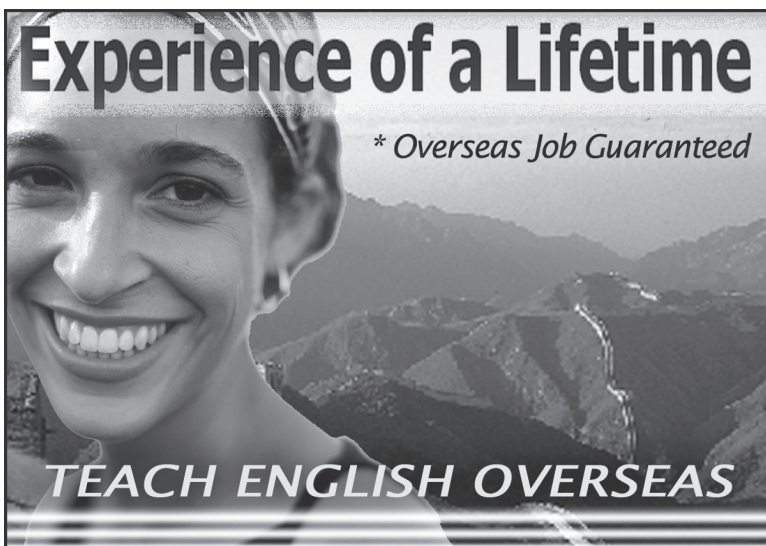
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featured album

Chingy

Hate It Or Love It

DTP Recordings

JOHN KMECH

Arts & Entertainment Staff

On occasion, artistic works are produced that are of such unprecedented magnitude that they transcend genre, medium, and perhaps even time to become cornerstones of the human experience. Masterpieces like Bizet's *Carmen* or Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro* must be appreciated for their contributions not only to music, but to human history. Similarly, the unforgettable hip-hopers of St Louis hoodstar Chingy will age gracefully past the 21st century.

Boasting a title that forces us to confront the intrinsic dichotomies present in our culture, the man responsible for "Right Thurr" provides a catalyst for social upheaval via lyrical prowess with his latest

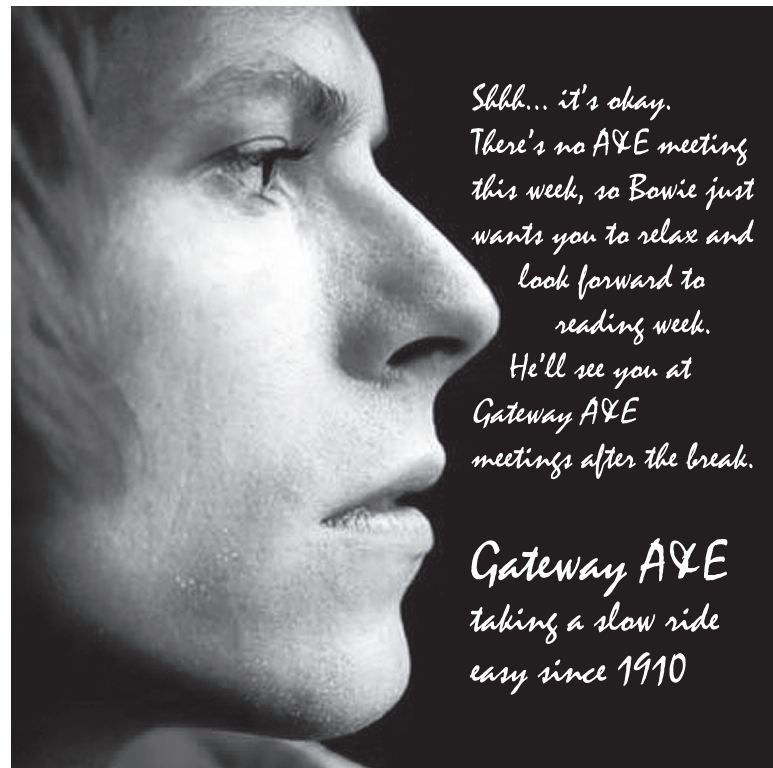
rhythmical epic *Hate It or Love It*. On the boisterous title track, he evokes nihilistic Dadaism and post-Ghetto *Fabulous* *Fabulous* in questioning life's meaning when he declares, "I don't give a fuck if you bitches don't like me." Elsewhere, on the aptly titled "Gimme Dat," he states, "I got my pockets all swoll, big bank rolls / A bad lil mamma, and she ready to go / I'm like, I just want that gushy / Gimme dat gushy." Indeed, wouldn't our materialistic world be better if we all demanded more gushy despite the abundance of Benjamins in our pockets?

Unlike other, more uncouth rappers, Ching-a-Ling promotes progressive social values in his lyrics,

proclaiming that fly-ass bitches with Coke-bottle bodies should be treated only with admiration and respect, while adding that he "feels bad for you fags" in a powerful statement against homophobia and the oppression of gays. This admitted balla' and alleged high rolla' isn't entirely selfless though, as exhibited on "Check My Swag," which alludes to the rapper's superiority in swag-showcasing endeavours as compared to fake players.

But perhaps his most profoundly intellectual rhythms are found in "Roll On Em," where the chorus urges the audience to "throw some candy on that bitch," a manifesto open to vast interpretations. While many believed that he couldn't improve on his flawless, tasteless 2006 release *Hoodstar*, the maestro born Howard Bailey Jr once again demonstrates his adeptness at pushing the envelope of the lowest common denominaturr.

Listen to tracks from *Hate It or Love It* on the *Editor's Playlist* at www.thegatewayonline.ca



Shhh... it's okay.
There's no AYE meeting
this week, so Bowie just
wants you to relax and
look forward to
reading week.
He'll see you at
Gateway AYE
meetings after the break.

Gateway AYE
taking a slow ride
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