



(From left) Daniel Schwartzman presents his one-act play 'To the Dogs' in Tel Aviv; Pnina Isseroff performs in 'Light in the Woods'; A Questor from the UK's largest amateur theater.

Holiday shows in English

THE number of original contributions to the 1992 English Drama Festival has jumped from one to three and I'll focus on two of them. This festival of amateur drama runs from April 19-22 at Yad Labanim in Tel Aviv.

A record 10 groups are participating, each presenting a one-act play. The only holdout is the Haifa English Theater which has allowed a squabble to get in the way of this intergroup get-together.

The original pieces, all being premiered at the festival, are *Faces* by Moshe Coren (Jerusalem Stage Players, April 19); *To the Dogs* by Daniel Schwartzman (Tel Aviv Community Theater, TACT, April 19); and *Light in the Woods* by Pnina Isseroff and Jodi Schenk (The Sharon Players, April 21).

Faces centers around a character named She whose life is revealed by the people who surround her. Coren won first prize at the 1990 Acre Festival for *Brothers*, directed by Zippora Peled who is directing *Faces* and has translated both plays from Hebrew.

To the Dogs is the third Schwartzman musical to be presented at the festival and this time he's directing it, too. It's about a couple of sensible pooches called Howler and Colonel

who just know their very shy owners are made for one another. How the two dogs, played by human actors of course, get Sue and Henry together forms the delightful and funny action of this gentle piece.

Schwartzman is a tall young man with a serious, Ed Sullivan sort of face who speaks earnestly of his music. He looks as though he wouldn't recognize a joke if it bit him, but both *Spy Stuff* (written with Rosally Saltzman), and *Starbound*, previous musicals premiered by TACT keep the audience laughing.

Fairly early on, he decided to compose music for the theater rather than the concert hall, despite a master's in composition and conducting, because "I think that modern music is a dead-end street. For the theater you can still write a tune."

He has been writing tunes for theater more or less continuously since emigrating from his native New York in 1978. He has been coach and music director at the Beit Zvi Drama School in Ramat Gan since 1983 and has composed music for most of Israel's repertory theaters.

PNINA ISSEROFF'S name has been bandied about lately. As well as being a finalist in the English Song

Festival with *Mr. Abernathy*, a musical, and directing her *Light in the Woods* for the drama festival, she recently won a prize on the BBC World Service show, *Megamix*.

Light in the Woods is a four-character show about a woman whose movie-star ex-husband comes back into her life after she's written a play that he wants to produce. It's

Helen Kaye

Schenk's first book and Isseroff's first musical and, if she has her way, the first of many collaborations between them.

Isseroff immigrated with her parents from her native Brooklyn in 1965 and started composing songs while she was still at high school. Formal studies followed in music and choral conducting at the Rubin Academy and at Princeton.

Over the last few years she has turned increasingly to composing children's songs and works for choir and soloists, not forgetting the pop genre. Currently she's also working as a vocal coach with choirs in Kfar Sava and Herzliya.

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"Working on this musical has been the greatest single kick of my life," she says of the rehearsal she conducts with director Schenk. Jodi Schenk immigrated from Chicago with husband Rob two years ago. Since then she has managed to write two more plays besides the musical.

Little Rainbow, a one-act play about two sisters meeting in the attic of their mother's house after her death, premiered last year. Her newest play is *The Last Meeting of the Round Table* which premieres with the Sharon Players in June. It's about a group of Holocaust survivors who meet after 20 years.

THE REST of the local shows in the Festival are *Encounters in the Park* (AACI Music Theater, Netanya, April 19), excerpts from a musical revue; a medley of Gilbert and Sullivan tunes (Logon); *Hard Stuff* (Rehovot English Players); *Village Wooing*, a duel of the sexes by G.B. Shaw (JEST); and *Housekeeper Wanted*, a comedy about a man who needs a housekeeper (AACI Netanya Drama Group) all on April 20; *The Devil's Cuspidor*, about a not-quite-so-ordinary church bazaar (Old Barn Players); and two of the monologs from *Talking Heads*, one about the pain of ageing and the other about an unobservant career

woman (TACT), all on April 21. All evening performances start at 8 p.m.

The London-based Questors Theater is this year's festival guest. It gives two performance on April 22 at 5:30 and 8:30 p.m. of Ferenc Molnar's *The Play's the Thing*. This is a comedy about a mysterious assignment and a young couple who are saved from certain dishonor by a clever playwright. P.G. (Jeeves) Wodehouse did the English version which was a smash hit in 1926, 1928 and 1948 on Broadway and in the West End.

Questors, established in 1929, is the UK's largest amateur theater with a membership of 3,800. *The Play's the Thing* is part of its European Season in which it will produce 12 plays, one from each of 12 European countries. A Questor season will typically contain classical, contemporary and even experimental plays.

Although an amateur theater, Questors has a superb reputation and many professional playwrights, actors and designers have premiered plays on one of its two state-of-the-art stages. Altogether, the theater puts on 21 plays every year at its Ealing home.

The Play's the Thing is directed by Michael (The Art of Coarse Acting) Green.