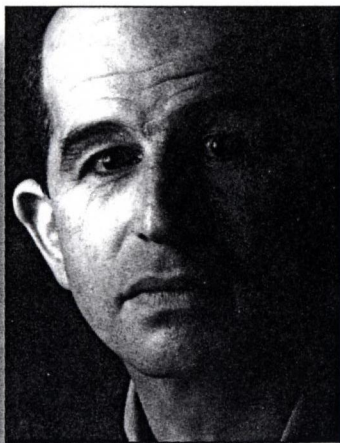


# Mister Ridiculous

by Michael Giltz

The Ridiculous Theatrical Company hasn't performed since last summer; the cast of its current show, "Corn," has no idea what it's doing; and artistic director Everett Quinton doesn't even know where they'll be performing next season. But he's happy. After all, the Ridiculous is back!



"Corn," which includes songs like "Hot Time in Hicksville" and "I've Been a Loner All My Life," begins previews April 5 at the Chelsea Playhouse. This finger-lickin' good country western musical was first a big hit in 1972, and Quinton expects today's audiences to feel the same.

"It's all about Lola Lola and the Lucky Stars," he explains. "Lola Lola is this big country-western star and she comes back to her hometown to do a free concert. But she has a huge chip on her shoulder -- Lola

wants to do the concert to show these people how big she's gotten.

"But Lola Lola has to get a big cornfield to do the show and that's when she stumbles on the Hatfields and the McCoys, who hate each other so much they've built a barbed wire fence in the middle of the field. So she has to get them to settle their differences."

Throughout its history, the Ridiculous has dealt in gender-bending comedies like "Camille," "The Mystery of Irma Vep" and "Brother Truckers," seemingly inconsequential shows that actually have a lot to say about the struggle to live with dignity.

And Quinton believes that "Corn" is no exception. "It's about how to make the world a safe place. That's the theme: What is it going to take to make everyone love each other and unite?"

If Quinton doesn't know where they'll

perform in the fall -- the 30th anniversary of the Ridiculous and the 10th since he took over after his lover, Charles Ludlam, died of AIDS -- it's because, as he likes to think of it, they have the rare luxury of choosing a theatre when they need one without any of the hassles.

After years of living on One Sheridan Square, Quinton is perfectly pleased being homeless. "I'm not interested in a permanent home anymore," Quinton says. "It's too expensive and I like floating around."

Nonetheless, he's looking forward to more revivals, including "No Damn Good" and Ludlam's "The Grand Tarot," along with a new adaptation of "Oliver Twist" he's working on called "Twisted Olivia."

The darkness that peeks around the edges of these tales seems much more upfront in Quinton's everyday life.

"I tend, I think, to be more heavy and message-y than Charles was," he admits.

"Charles had a lighter touch and he always said you had to lighten the impact of it. Total reality would be too gruesome."

Quinton peppers his soft-spoken comments with pessimistic run-downs of the world's ills: The cuts in funding for the arts, strife in Bosnia, hungry people in America,

and repeated use of the word "rage." Born in Brooklyn, the 40-ish actor vividly remembers how different he felt as a child.

"When I was a kid I thought I was nuts. I would go take a shower and behind those closed doors I would wrap myself in a towel and fantasize." He mimes the posture of a screen diva, smiling at the memory. "I thought I was cuckoo. I didn't know it was about wanting to act.

"Also, I would play women so I thought 'Oh God, I'm this faggot.' It frightened me because the world is not safe for queers. It wasn't then and it's still not now."

His secret didn't stay hidden for long. "One time I got caught pretending I was in heels," Quinton remembers. "Oh, I was mortified. I was 12 years old and I was humiliated by my brothers and my father. And then when I found the Ridiculous, and I've often said this before, it saved my life. Suddenly everyone was doing what I wanted to do."

Indeed, once he found that oasis, Quinton never looked back. And despite his bouts of pessimism, "I don't go around in doom and gloom," he says. "I have a lovely life and my lover Michael is great. I have a degree of peace in my life that I never had before." ★

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