

**Chaos and Hard Times**, by Brandon Cole (Westbeth Theatre Center, 151 Bank St., 691-2272, through August 8), concerns a prodigal son who returns home to find that his widowed mother is running a reeducation camp for two unemployed freeloaders and a recently released mental patient. Ema sweetly hectors her charges on the importance of keeping busy and telling the truth. Booker, a pompous preppie, sits in the easy chair all day reading, and claims to be a poet. Ralph, an uneducated slob, claims to be a filmmaker but is more attracted to the sofa. Morrow prefers to sit on the floor playing dominoes, or just sitting. He is a pathologically docile man, given to occasional violent outbursts. When he proffers observations he is often right, but everyone tells him he's wrong.

Ema's son Jesse has been away for three years. He's grown homesick, but he soon realizes he's been supplanted by his mother's new family. Sensitive to both the humor and the horror of the situation—his mother is an aging Wendy to her overgrown Lost Boys—he sees that an adult presence is needed; but mature behavior does not win Ema's attention. He resorts to other means.

This is a fascinating play. It obliquely addresses the meaning of maturity, of sanity, even

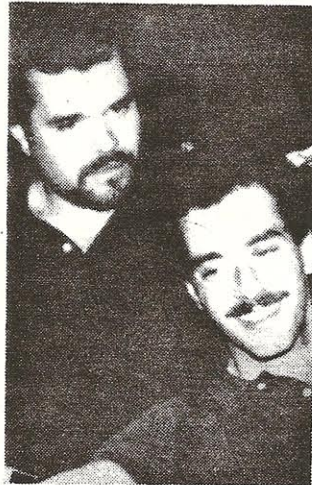
the meaning of life. The characters are subtly defined. We are satisfied to imagine where they came from and how they met without the author's hauling out any life stories or guilty secrets in the third act. Playwright Cole is secure enough to write serious drama with many funny moments and witty lines.

The actors all have range and power. They are on the right track, but not quite focused. The play's complex characters demand to be grown into, and showcase production schedules do not usually afford time for this development. John Turturro's Jesse is particularly well realized, and William Hentay as Morrow, Michael Badalucco as Ralph, Matt Sussman as Booker, Rebecca Dobson as Ema, and director Laurence Maslon can all be commended.

—Jessica Raimi

# OTHER STAGES

OTHERSTAGES JULY 29, 1982



*Chaos and Hard Times.*

## Critics' Choices for 1982

### Ten Best—Dan Isaac

1. *Don Juan*, by Moliere, directed by Richard Foreman.
2. *Trespassing*, directed by Joe Chaikin.
3. *The Dining Room*, by A.R. Gurney, directed by David Trainer.
4. *Plenty*, written and directed by David Hare.
5. *Wielopole, Wielopole*, by Tadeusz Kantor.
6. *Before She Was Even Born*, by Leah Friedman, directed by Susan Einhorn.
7. *Geniuses*, by Jonathan Reynolds.
8. *The Great Grandson of Jedediah Kohler*, written by John Bishop, at Circle Rep.
9. *Birdbath*, by Leonard Melfi, directed by Tom O'Horgan.
10. *The Roads to Home*, by Horton Foote, directed by Calvin Skaggs, Manhattan Punch Line.

### Favorites—Mimi Leahey

1. *Edmond*, by David Mamet, directed by Gregory Mosher, Provincetown Playhouse.
2. *The Dining Room*, by A.R. Gurney, Jr., directed by David Trainer, Playwrights Horizons.
3. *Geniuses*, by Jonathan Reynolds, directed by Gerald Gutierrez, Playwrights Horizons.
4. *The Roads to Home*, by Horton Foote, directed by Calvin Skaggs, Manhattan Punch Line.
5. *Herringbone*, book by Tom Cone, lyrics by Ellen Fitzhugh, music by Skip Kennon, with David Rounds, Playwrights Horizons.
6. *Little Shop of Horrors*, Book and lyrics by Howard Ashman, music by Alan Menken, WPA.
7. *Scenes From American Life*, by A.R. Gurney, Jr., directed by Worth Howe, at Trinity Rep.
8. *A Think Piece*, by Jules Feiffer, at Circle Rep.
9. *Livingstone and Sechele*, by David Pownall, directed by Will Lieberman, Quaih Theater.
10. *When We Dead Awaken*, by Ibsen, directed by Steve Zuckerman, Open Space.

### Favorites—Caroline Shookhoff (no order of preference)

1. *Torch Song Trilogy*, by Harvey Fierstein, directed by Peter Pope, The Glines, Richard Allen Center.
2. *True West*, by Sam Shepard, directed by Gary Sinise, Cherry Lane Theatre.
3. *Buddies*, by Mary Gallagher, directed by Mary Robinson, Ensemble Studio Theater.
4. *The Roads to Home*, by Horton Foote, directed by Calvin Skaggs, Manhattan Punch Line.
5. *Yellow Fever*, by R.A. Shiomi, Pan Asian Repertory Theatre.
6. *Becoming*, by Anton Gill, directed by Mervyn Willis, La Mama.
7. *Maiden Stakes*, by David Libman, directed by Anita Khanzadian, St. Clement's.

### 10 Fave Raves—Renfreu Neff (no order of preference)

1. *The Death of Von Richthofen As Witnessed From the Earth*, written and directed by Des McAuff, Public Theater.
2. *Chaos and Hard Times*, by Brandon Cole, directed by Laurence Maslon.
3. *Childhood of a Saint*, by Alan Brunton, RedMole Enterprises.
4. *The Brothers*, by Kathleen Collins, directed by Billie Allen.
5. *The Local Stigmatic*, by Heathcote Williams, directed by Lindzee Smith, Nightshift Theatre Company.
6. *Kitty Hawk*, by Len Jenkin, directed by Gene Nye, Lion Theatre Ensemble.
7. *The Great Grandson of Jedediah Kohler*, by John Bishop, directed by John Bard Manulis and Marshall W. Mason, Circle Repertory.
8. *Don Juan*, by Moliere, directed by Richard Foreman.
9. *The Ghost Sonata*, by Strindberg, directed by Christopher Martin and Karen Sunde, CSC Repertory.
10. *Faust, Part I and Part II*, by Goethe, directed

### Ten Best—Joseph Hurley

1. *Angels Fall*, by Lanford Wilson, directed by Marshall Mason, Circle Rep.
2. *True West*, by Sam Shepard, directed by Gary Sinise, Cherry Lane Theatre.
3. *Plenty*, written and directed by David Hare The Public Theater.
4. *The Singular Life of Albert Nobbs*, adapted by and directed by Simone Benmussa, at Manhattan Theatre Club.
5. *How I Got That Story*, by Amlin Gray directed by Carole Rothman.
6. *The Fox*, by Allan Miller, at the Round about.
7. *Trespassing*, by Joseph Chaikin, La Mama
8. *Birdbath*, by Leonard Melfi, directed by Tom O'Horgan.
9. *Chucky's Hunch*, by Rochelle Owens, directed by Elinor Renfield.
10. *Delmore*, at the Jewish Repertory Theater.

### Rosette Lamont

1. *Antigone*, by Sophocles, directed by Jo Chaikin, Public Theater.
2. *Giaconde*, by Hikmet, directed by Pau Zimet, La Mama.
3. *Faust, Parts One & Two*, by Goethe, directed by Christopher Martin, CSC Rep.
4. *A Visit*, written and directed by Maria Iren Fornes, Theater for the New City.
5. *Specimen Days*, written and directed by Meredith Monk, The Public Theater.
6. *The Man Who Laughs*, by Victor Hugo directed and performed by Gerard Guillaume La Mama.
7. *In Regard of Flight*, written and directed by Bill Irwin, the American Place Theater.
8. *The Three Travels of Aladdin*, written and directed by Francoise Grund, La Mama.