

# Crackpot : a play about the plight of the immigrant

By Sarah Gignac

Halifax, Nova Scotia

Pier 21 kicked off its Kenneth C. Rowe Heritage Hall Millennium Program with a production of Rachel Wyatt's play *Crackpot*, co-produced with Acadia Theatre Company.

The Millennium Program was started by Pier 21 to provide a forum to celebrate the diversity of Canadians and the strength it brings to Canada. *Crackpot* was chosen because the story line is so compelling and most appropriate to what Pier 21 represents.

The history of the play is also appealing, both Adele Wiseman (author of the novel *Crackpot*) and Rachel Wyatt immigrated to Canada. "It provided an opportunity to honour their accomplishments as Canadians", explains Alexandra Taylor, Manager of sales and program development for Pier 21.

Wiseman wrote *Crackpot* in 1974. While it is not autobiographical, Wiseman drew upon her own experiences growing up in Saskatchewan. Her parents immigrated to Canada from Russia and



The cast of *Crackpot*

settled in Winnipeg, were she was born Wiseman and Wyatt worked together at the Banff Centre for the Arts for many years.

*Crackpot* is the story of a Jewish community in Winnipeg during the First and Second World War. It focuses on Hoda whose mother dies early, leaving her to care for her blind father. Turned away by family and abused by friends, Hoda is left with only one means of survival, prostitution.

*Crackpot* centers on the plight of the immigrant in pre-war Canada. It juxtaposes the personal struggles of Hoda and her father with the suffering the world bore during the wars. "It is a live story that opens the heart of the audience," says Bernhardt, director of the play. "Every character, every scene shows an incredible need for love."

"There is a real sense of healing that surrounds the whole play," adds Orin Dash, who played Uncle Nate, "The audience has an opportunity to take a look at the plight (of the Jews), the oppression, the struggle, and the optimism."