

Gung Ho *a humourous new comedy*

by **TERRY DUPUIS**
Thirty-year-old Ron Howard's career has undergone many phases, from child actor to teen star to movie director and producer. He may still be remembered fondly by television viewers as Opie on the "Andy Griffith" show or as Richie Cunningham on the "Happy Days" series, but the talented young man has made a successful transition to working behind the cameras.

Ron Howard set up his own production company a few years back, and not one of his films has lost money. He has made *Night Shift*, *Splash*, *Cocoon* and now *Gung Ho*.

When I first heard the title I wondered if Howard had made a war movie this time. *Gung Ho* was the title of an old Randolph Scott World War Two movie, and I had the thought cross my mind that this new film might be some sort of a remake. But it turned out that Ron Howard's *Gung Ho* has nothing to do with the old movie. They have only the title in common.

Howard's *Gung Ho* is a modern-day comedy. Like the film maker's previous film, humour predominates. *Night*

Shift was a sort of a black comedy, *Splash* was a romantic comedy and *Cocoon* was a science-fiction comedy. Some might object to *Cocoon* being called a comedy, but it certainly did have strong comical element in its tale of a group of senior citizens who encounter extraterrestrials.

Gung Ho deals with the relationship between the Japanese and American automobile industries, and that's about as topical as you can get. The subject of American-Japanese trade relations is frequently on the news, and so Howard's comedy benefits from being very timely.

In fact the idea for the screenplay was suggested to writer Edwin Blum when he saw a "60 Minutes" segment about a Japanese takeover of an auto factory in Tennessee.

Screenwriters Lowell Ganz and Babaloo Mandel then came up with the screenplay which became *Gung Ho*. Their story is set in the fictional town of Hadleyville, Pennsylvania, where an auto plant closes down. Since this was the town's main industry, things get pretty rough for the residents.

But a brash hard-

working foreman played by Michael Keaton takes the bull by the horns and convinces a Japanese auto firm to take over the factory. Keaton becomes known as the Man Who Saved Hadleyville, since he gets the town's economy moving once again.

But Keaton and Hadleyville get more than they bargained for in the culture clash which develops when the Japanese start running the plant their way, coming into conflict with the American workers there. George Wendt who plays on television's "Cheers" comedy is outstanding as a disgruntled welder who has difficulty adjusting to the ways of his

new employers. Wendt had another terrific role recently as William Katt's neighbour in *House*. He has the makings of a great humourous character actor.

Also very humourous in this new comedy are two Japanese actors, Gedde Watanabe and Soh Yamamura. But the movie's star Michael Keaton will probably be *Gung Ho*'s main drawing card.

This comedian made his screen debut in Ron Howard's directorial debut *Night Shift*, and he has been steadily employed ever since in comedies like *Mr. Mom* and *Johnny Dangerously*. *Gung Ho* marks a reteaming for star and director.

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Apr. 5 at 2 p.m. Gryphon Theatre brings to Barrie the first of its spring children's series on stage at Georgian College.

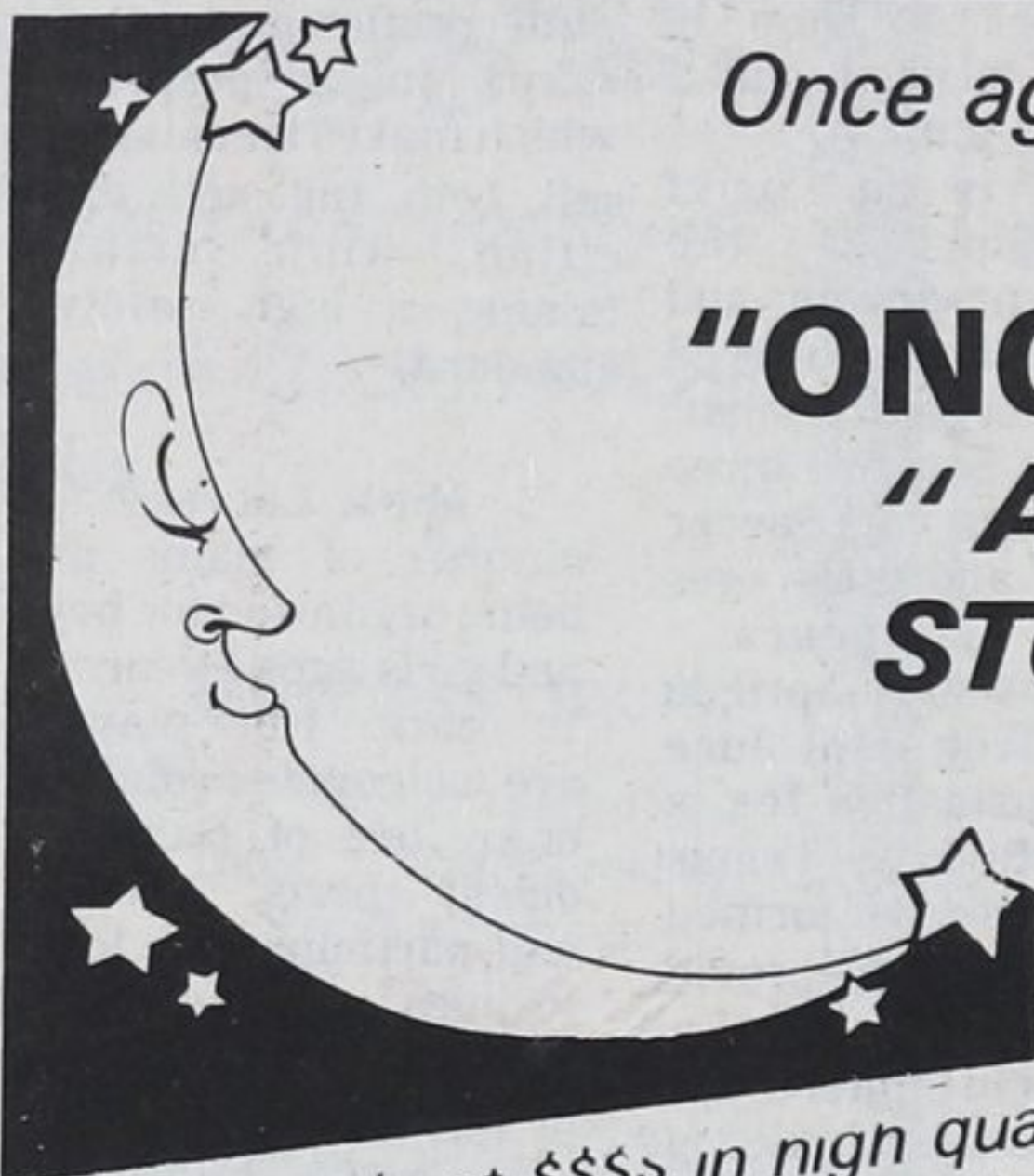
Theatre Beyond Words' production, *The Potato People*, introduces the cartoon-like characters with papier mache faces, which have captured the hearts of audiences everywhere.

Presented in the style of the animated cartoon, the production is concerned with the daily home life of the Potato family and their friends.

The main characters are: Momma Potato, the compulsive organizer who tries to keep her back yard and her family neat and tidy; Poppa Potato, whose main concern is to do as little as possible; and Nancy Potato, whose lovable innocence and curiosity usually gets her in trouble.

The production appeals to all age groups. While children like the excitement of action and the antics of Nancy Potato, adults will relate to the subtle humor of the Momma-Poppa relationship and satiric humor inherent in the trivial moments of domestic discord.

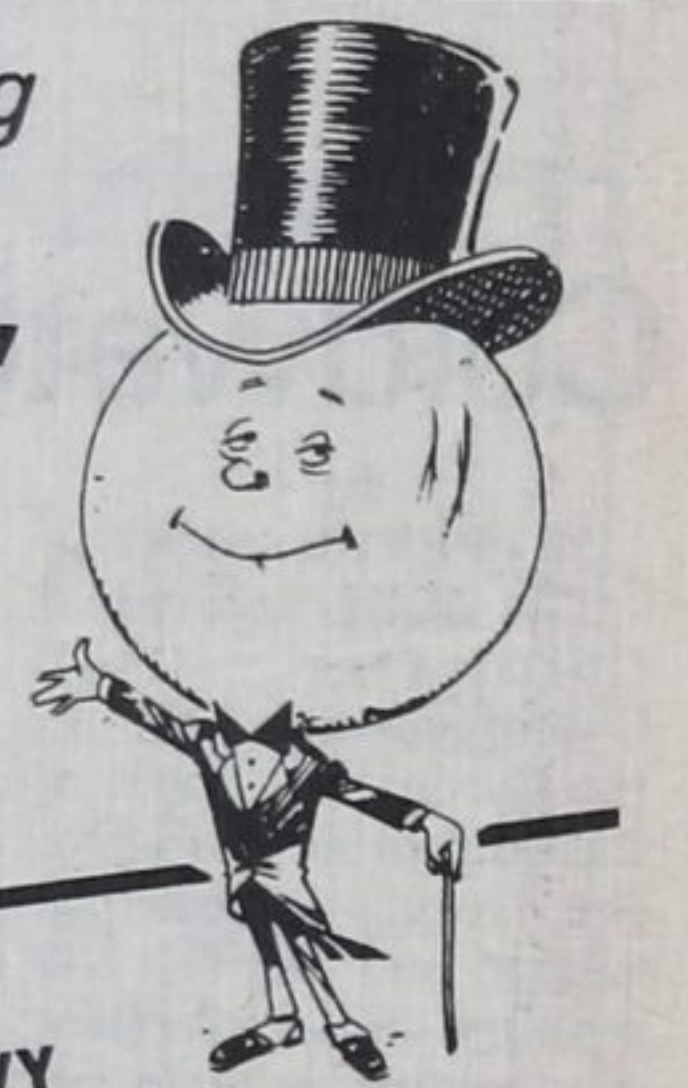
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