If Cows Could Fly

National Post, Friday March 10, 2000
by Robert Cushman

“The best of it comes early on when Merovitz tells of his grandparents and of their coming to Canada. His maternal grandfather fled Poland at the beginning of the 20th century, travelling by hay cart and railway, to escape conscription. ... He fetched up in London where he met his future wife, a refugee from Latvia.... Together they embarked for Canada, where they found themselves in a tiny fishing village in Nova Scotia, the only Jews the place had ever seen. This collision of two cultures, each of them about equally remote from a modern metropolitan perspective, provides the most fascinating part of the show; you can sniff the sea-air, and taste the omnipresent fish, cooked every which way.”

“The music, and Merovitz’s performance of it, are the strongest parts of the show. ... It’s all done with great energy and authority; both in speech and song Merovitz seems to have every Canadian and U.S. idiom down pat.”

Eye Communications Ltd., March 2, 2000
Onstage by Joanne Huffa

“Allan Merovitz’s new play is a one-man, musically driven story of his Jewish family’s experiences in Canada that’s definitely suitable for family entertainment. But resisting the stereotypes that keep urban audiences away from the clearly “unedgy,” If Cows Could Fly is a crafted, well-executed piece of personal theatre.

Merovitz is a good storyteller and a beautiful singer, and If Cows Could Fly is laden with songs ranging from fiddle and country ballads to klezmer and jazz standards (Merovitz portrays his loved-and-lost aunt for a wonder rendition of “You Made Me Love You”).

The songs connect the various family members and their stories through the years: Merovitz’s biological grandfather’s “falling-down disease,” his uncle’s turn as a soldier in WWII and his own youthful experiences with anti-Semitism and clueless ignorance. It’s a fascinating story for anyone with an interest in social history.

Paula Citron, Classical 96 & 103 FM June 2001

One of Artword Theatre's specialties is producing solo productions about the Canadian experience. Currently, Artword is running Allan Merovitz's musical play "If Cows Could Fly" about growing up Jewish in the Ottawa Valley. Because Canada is a land of immigrants, these stories have a wide appeal because, in effect, each is a reflection of why our own families came to a new land.

Merovitz is most familiar as the former lead singer of the Flying Bulgar Klezmer Band, and music plays a large part in "If Cows Could Fly". The singer is blessed with a light, expressive, folk song voice, and the show cleverly interweaves Yiddish and Klezmer songs with Ottawa Valley Celtic fiddle music. Merovitz is supported by musicians Jarl Anderson and Ronald Weihs who also supply appropriate sound effects when needed. Merovitz is a gamin-like, energetic, charming performer who portrays all the various and eccentric characters with gusto. Weihs also directs with just the right touch of both humour and pathos.

The first part of Merovitz's story is his maternal grandfather's flight from Poland and cross-European journey until his final destination in Canada. The second half picks up Merovitz's family in Smith Falls, where his Zaide finally settled. While the change of scene could be smoother with a few more details, the contrast is fascinating - his Zaide leaving to find a better life, and the life that the family ultimately found, both the good and the bad.