

Big names writing 'new' Spring Thaw

By **JIM BEEBE**
Star staff writer

Spring Thaw may be a bit of Canadiana that we won't have to feel apologetic about, producer Howard Bateman said yesterday.

Bateman, 32, and co-producer John Uren, 33, said they have commissioned musical material by "names" such as Gordon Lightfoot, Joni Mitchell, Oscar Peterson, Boris Brodt and The Band among others for the 23rd edition of the annual review which begins previews Jan. 27 at the Playhouse Theatre.

"No one had ever asked them to write for Spring Thaw before," Bateman said.

"We're bringing Spring Thaw up to date," Uren added. "Ten years ago it was fine—for 10 years ago. But it never changed."

Its outdatedness was most apparent last spring when it closed its Toronto run at the Royal Alexandra Theatre a week early after being panned critically.

Bateman and Uren acquired three years' production rights from Mavor Moore last summer and began revamping the annual review.

They scaled it down to the 500-seat Playhouse Theatre, which is more "economically viable," in Uren's words. According to Bateman, they're remodeling the theatre so that the action

will take place all around the audience.

They were able to raise the money by offering 60 \$1,000 shares. But, surprisingly, casting has been a problem.

Bateman said that out of over 400 people who auditioned he found only four or five who were usable—of the 10 needed. He found a local six-piece rock group, Icarus, for the show, but is thinking of casting the rest of his Canadian show in New York or Chicago.

"Most of the people who showed up were amazing," he said, "totally unprepared, no idea of professionalism." He said most audi-

tioners in Toronto don't even have photographs of themselves. or if they do they want them back, whereas any aspiring actor in New York would have a trunkful of pictures."

Bateman, who also produced the long-running Jacques Brel show at the Playhouse, is planning to run Spring Thaw only for three months at the most and then taking a shot at off-Broadway in April at the Village Gate where Jacques Brel has been playing for three years.

He said this year's show would consist of fast-paced black-out skits of the Laugh-In genre.

Dateline Entertainment

Spencer Williams of 'Andy' fame dead

HOLLYWOOD (UPI) — Funeral services will be held today for Spencer Williams, who played Andy on the Amos 'N' Andy television series in the '50s. Williams died at a hospital here Saturday at the age of 76.

CTV's Chercover re-appointed

The CTV television network yesterday announced that Murray H. Chercover has been reappointed president and managing director

Also re-appointed at the Nov. 28 annual meeting in Montreal of the CTV shareholders and board of directors was Keith Campbell as vice-president, marketing. James Packham, former secretary-treasurer, was named vice-