

THE PERFORMING ARTS IN CANADA

Reprinted below is the first part of a review of the growth of the performing arts in Canada, which was contained in the July/August 1972 issue of the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce Commercial Letter. Subsequent issues of the Canadian Weekly Bulletin will carry the remainder of the article, covering such aspects of the arts as folklore, financing, recent and musical developments and education.

Theatre in Canada traces its origins to Acadia and New France. The first dramatic presentation to be offered in what is now Canada was a marine masque, *Le Théâtre de Neptune*. The play, which was a welcome to Samuel de Champlain on his return from one of his expeditions, was performed by Indians and voyageurs, and the performance took place on the shores of the Annapolis River on the Bay of Fundy on November 14, 1606. The first play to be presented in Quebec was a tragedy performed in 1640 to celebrate the birthday of the Dauphin of France. One of the earliest Canadian plays had dialogue in French and also the languages of the Huron and Algonquin peoples, and was staged in Quebec in 1658.

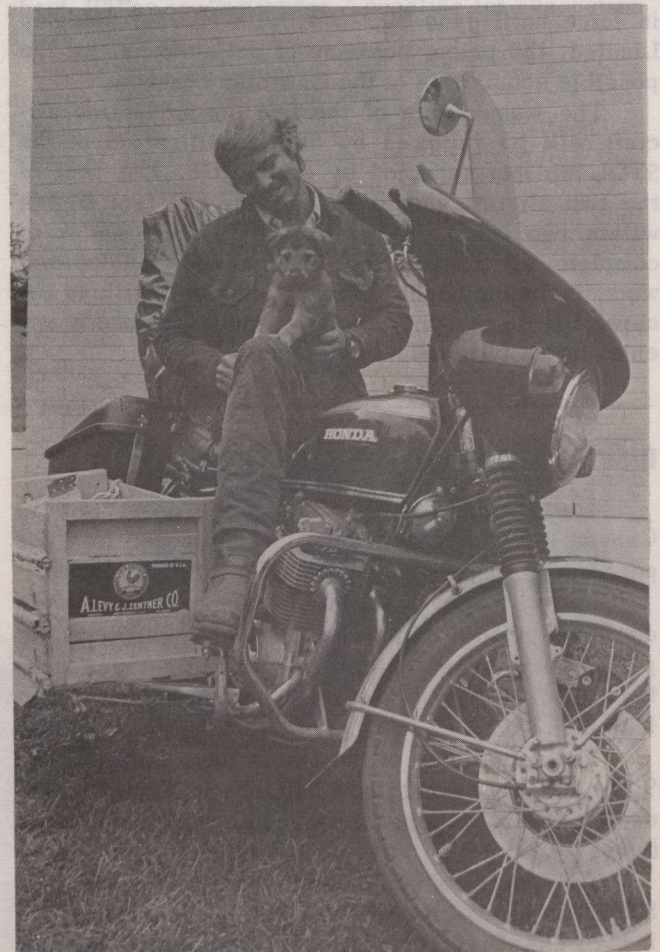
During the eighteenth century, touring companies of English and American professionals began to appear in Canada. The plays performed were those then current in the London repertoire. A three-act comedy written in Halifax in 1774, entitled *Acadius or Love in a Calm*, is considered perhaps the first original work by an English-speaking playwright. By the latter years of the century, dramatic performances by both professional and amateur groups had become fairly frequent. During the nineteenth century, performances in English, both professional and amateur, continued to increase, while dramatic performances in French remained relatively infrequent.

The first real theatre in Montreal, the Theatre Royal, opened in 1825 and there was a theatre of sorts in Toronto before 1830 and gradually theatres came into being in cities and towns where there was adequate support. In some areas these theatres endured for many years, while in others there was a succession of houses or several changes in name and management. In 1862, British Columbia's first theatre was opened. The same year also saw the formation of the Garrick Club in Hamilton, out of which the still active Players Guild was developed. By 1870, soldiers stationed in Winnipeg were staging dramatic performances and French groups had become established in the West, especially in St. Boniface, Manitoba and Edmonton, Alberta.

During the latter years of the nineteenth century, and well into the present century, a system of touring companies, known as the "Road", flourished and brought to Canada many eminent British and United States performers. Due to a number of reasons, the "Road" came to an end between the two world wars.

Competition from the cinema and radio, the increased expense of production and travel, the loss of audience support because of a deterioration in the standard of touring companies, the long-run system in London and New York, the depression and, especially, the growing decline in the number of suitable theatres, all contributed to its eventual disappearance. Control of most of the theatres was acquired by the moving-picture chains thus making them unavailable for legitimate stage productions. Valiant attempts at establishing native repertory companies achieved no permanent success.

In the 1930s, while the professional theatre languished, radio began to provide Canadians with their national theatre and remained the principal vehicle for artistic expression until the advent of television in the early 1950s. A wide spectrum of classical and contemporary plays was presented on radio by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation during the period and radio became the showcase for Canadian writers and actors, both English-speaking and French-speaking.



Dave Stearns of Lighthouse Point, Florida, and Denver, his inseparable companion knight of the road, were among the more than 10,000 visitors to the information centre at Atomic Energy of Canada's Chalk River Nuclear Laboratories this summer.